Supporting Children's Acquisition Of Language And Literacy: An Investigation Into The Work Of Classroom Assistants In Mainstream Primary Schools

Thesis

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Irene E. Mersh
Personal Identifier E0025079

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION (EdD)
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The School of Education: Open University

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Supporting children's acquisition of language and literacy: an investigation of the work carried out by classroom assistants in mainstream primary schools.

ABSTRACT

This small-scale ethnographic study reports on an investigation into the ways in which classroom assistants support the development of children's language and literacy in a limited number of mainstream primary schools. The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of the ways in which assistants support children, the influence of school policies on their work and how, or if, their own language and literacy practices affected their work. The study was carried out between 1997– 2000, a period, which coincided with the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy. Phase One, a pilot study documented the work of classroom assistants in one urban primary school for 5 – 11 year olds. Phase Two, the distribution of a questionnaire survey to 39 urban primary schools and brief observations and interviews in eight of those schools was based on the information obtained in phase one. The data from phase two was analysed and used to select three schools for phase three, two primary and one infant as 'core data' schools. This report discusses the results from the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and observations. It indicates some of the ways in which assistants' personal literacy practices were used to support children and the links between these and school policy documents. The findings suggest that the management style and ethos of a school affected the deployment of assistants, their access to training and their status as members of staff. The study concludes that heads and teachers need to be aware of not only of what assistants are asked to do but *how* they do it in order to monitor and evaluate their work, use the skills they bring to the job and plan tailored training.

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CHAPTER ONE – BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Introduction

Classroom assistants have supported the work of teachers for many generations of school children. During the 1960s and 1970s their main role was to act as an 'extra pair of hands' to help with the youngest children and it was rare to find them working in junior classrooms (Lee & Mawson, 1998). Adamson (1999) reports that it was Lady Plowden in 1967 who first realised the potential for developing their role based on provision at that time. The numbers of assistants employed has grown steadily since. The Warnock Report (DES1978), which encouraged mainstream schools to include pupils with learning difficulties, led to a big increase in the numbers of assistants employed. This trend has continued as further Government initiatives, such as the Code of Practice for Pupils with Special Educational Needs (DfEE 1994), the Green Paper (DfEE 1998b) together with the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE 1998) and National Numeracy Strategy (DfEE 1999) have all put pressure on schools to have additional adults in classrooms to support the children, the teacher and the school. The Green Paper 'Teachers: Meeting the Challenge of Change' (DfEE 1998b) announced a drive to recruit a further 20,000 full-time equivalent assistants by 2002. The growth in the numbers of assistants has been accompanied by a change in title from terms like 'auxiliaries'; 'non-teaching staff' and 'welfare or care assistants' to that of 'classroom assistant' and 'learning support assistant' – a title generally used for those supporting children with Special Educational Needs - to that of 'teaching assistant'.

The notion of researching language and literacy in connection with the work of assistants was conceived whilst noting their interactions with children as I visited classrooms, in the context of my work as a member of the Local Education Authority's Support Service. I observed them working with individual pupils or groups of children, both in and out of the classroom.

Many of the assistants I observed were involved in activities designed to support the acquisition and development of language and literacy. The assistants were, through their interactions with children, playing a central role in supporting aspects of school-based language and literacy, which for many children might have been different from those they encountered at home. My own interest in children's development of language and literacy, as well as other elements of my work in schools, convinced me that their diverse roles could bear further scrutiny.

The aims of this small-scale ethnographic study, which developed out of my experience of working as a member of a Local Education Authority (LEA) Support Service, were to:

1. Investigate the ways and the contexts in which classroom assistants supported children engaged in language and literacy tasks.
2. Explore how the assistants' own language and literacy histories and personal practices affected the ways in which they worked in schools.
3. Look at the ways in which school policies and practices influenced assistants' work with children.

Areas examined in relation to the above included:

a) The extent to which assistants drew on their own literacy histories and personal practices in supporting pupils.
b) How far the assistants' work with children was consistent with the language and literacy policy documents in school, and how or if, this was reflected in the assistants reporting and recording procedures.
c) Any adjustments assistants needed to make when working with different teachers and across different age groups.
d) How assistants used any published packages/programmes to support children's work on language and literacy.

The study is related to a theoretical framework that examined: the centrality of language to the processes of teaching and learning, the debates about literacy and how it should be taught, including literacy as a social practice and current literature on the role of the classroom assistant.

The research project covered the period 1997 – 2000 and, therefore, captured assistants working during a period of considerable educational change. The impact of Local Management of Schools and the introduction of the Code of Practice for pupils with Special Educational Needs had already had the effect of changing the primary role of assistants from that of 'domestic helper' to 'assistant teacher'. (Clayton, 1993)

The research project, at its conception, did not set out to study the impact of the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy in September 1998, (DfEE) nor the subsequent introduction of the Additional Learning Support materials in September 1999 (DfEE). However, as the National Literacy Strategy adopted a particular political and philosophical stance with regard to the acquisition and development of language and literacy this has, inevitably, become an important part of the context of my research. This stance may, or may not, have reflected the views or language and literacy histories and personal practices of teachers and assistants working in schools. As Czerniewska (1992) wrote,

> ...there is no one 'autonomous' model of literacy. Rather one needs to see literacy as a set of social practices that are shaped by political and ideological factors so that some are more highly valued than others. (p.19).

Although this research project began before the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy, the concerns about standards of literacy which generated this initiative, and the various philosophical stances currently being debated about the nature of literacy and how it should be taught, are not new. (Flesch 1955, Thompson 1979, Fox 1993 and McGuinness 1998). The

classroom assistants who have worked in schools for several years may have had their views mediated both by the teachers with whom they have worked and by reports on the teaching of English in the media. Such reports tended to focus on the argument that standards of literacy amongst British school children were falling, and then go on to offer various panaceas, generally linked to learning phonics. For example, John Clare, writing in the Daily Telegraph (06.07.99) stated that teachers "were wrong to claim that phonics – showing how sounds are written – was an inefficient and outmoded way to teach reading." p. 21

Data for the research project was gathered during the period 1997 – 2000 and covered three phases. Owing to changes in my teaching career, I investigated the work of assistants in three local authorities. Phase one, the pilot study (Mersh, 1997/8), focused on the work of classroom assistants in one urban primary school. At this time I was working as Head of Special Needs Support Service. However, the Local Education Authority for which I worked reorganised centrally funded services for pupils with Special Educational Needs and I took up a new appointment as a Literacy Consultant in another authority. In order to build upon the pilot study and gain a broader picture of the work of classroom assistants, during phase two a questionnaire was devised, trialled and circulated to all the primary schools in the second authority during the academic year 1998/9. Some interviews and observations in eight schools were also carried out during this period. The reorganisation of the county, in which I was working into six unitary authorities, and a change in family circumstances, meant that my job changed once again. I took up a new post, within the same county boundaries but in a different education authority, to run a Literacy Project. The third phase of my research, which gradually developed from my analysis of the data gathered during phase two, the questionnaire survey plus brief interviews and observations in the eight schools, involved the final and more sharply focused stage of my research. It included audio taped interviews and observations, as well as the collection of policy

documents from three urban primary schools in the third authority. The schools were selected in order to illustrate the range and diversity of language and literacy support offered by assistants. Practice in the chosen schools also highlighted the range and complexity of management and training issues.

Any findings from a small-scale study cannot be conclusive and will not relate to all situations. However, as Swann & Loxley (1998) acknowledged the work of classroom assistants in supporting the acquisition and development of language and literacy is an under-researched area that could bear further scrutiny. Heads and teachers acknowledged that assistants, as the other significant adults in primary school classrooms, played an important role in children's emotional, social, cultural and educational development. As this report will show factors of status, management, training, the assistants' own perceptions of how they supported children's learning and the extent to which they drew on their own language histories and personal practices, all played a critical part in the roles they performed.

Background to the research

My work brought me into contact with classroom assistants in several ways:

1. Visiting schools to assess the language and literacy needs of pupils whose achievements were causing concern.
2. Observing teachers and assistants working with children.
3. Discussing in-service training needs and advising on the use of resources and strategies to support the development of language and literacy.
4. Contributing to the county training programme for assistants which included sessions on reading, writing, spelling, handwriting and basic number work as part of the Royal Society of Arts (R.S.A.) 'Certificate for Literacy & Numeracy Support Assistants'.

5. Discussing with teachers and classroom assistants the writing of Individual Education Plans for pupils with Special Educational Needs.
6. Attending meetings with speech and language therapists who provided programmes for individual pupils, which were delivered by classroom assistants.
7. Serving on the Area Pupil Support Panel which allocated to schools teaching time from members of the Special Needs Support Service and money to employ assistants for children at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice for pupils with Special Educational Needs, on a temporary basis.

Whilst observing classroom assistants and discussing their work with teachers it became obvious that they were deployed in a variety of ways in order to support the work of individual pupils and groups of children, the teachers and the schools. They helped to implement speech and language programmes provided by speech therapists, used published programmes such as the Phonological Awareness Training (PAT) pack. (Wilson 1994) Assistants heard children read, acted as scribes for pupils who had difficulty writing and helped groups of children by clarifying the teachers' instructions or guiding them as they completed assignments.

In some schools assistants were viewed as an integral part of the school team. They used the staff room at lunch and break times, had access to children's records, were invited to relevant school-based in-service training sessions and were funded to attend other courses. Their views about children's needs were taken into account – even if somewhat informally. Any particular skills, such as word-processing or a flair for art and craft, were employed to support pupils and teachers. In other schools, however, the status of the teacher as the professional was more closely guarded. Assistants were not welcomed into the staff room and often took their breaks at a different time and in a different location. The role of the

assistant was to work under the teacher; opinions regarding pupils' work were not sought and little, if any, thought was given to the need for job related training. In many institutions, the situation observed fell somewhere between the two extremes. The same range of practices across schools in the way they deployed assistants and used their skills was reported by HMI. (DES 1992).

Prior to, and during the early stages of the research project, the Local Education Authority in which I worked planned and delivered certificated training courses for non-teaching assistants, as they were then called. Listening to assistants' experiences and concerns about a wide range of issues, it became apparent both from them and heads and teachers, that school staff needed support in deploying, managing and evaluating the work of classroom assistants, especially in the area of language and literacy development, as this formed a large part of the support assistants offered. In their report Connell & Rennie (1997) argued that schools needed support to enable teaching and ancillary staff to form effective classroom teams, which included classroom assistants. The issue of training for teachers and classroom assistants became increasingly important during the course of the study with the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy in 1998. The impact of this will be discussed in later chapters. In view of the increasing number of classroom assistants being recruited to support children's learning, the skills, values and beliefs about the development of language and literacy and their practices when working with children, became even more significant.

Lee & Mawson (1998) reported that the overwhelming majority of classroom assistants were women and this finding has been supported by my research. All the assistants encountered during the three phases of my research were women.

The names of all schools and the staff and children working in them have been altered to preserve confidentiality and anonymity.

Outline of the Dissertation

Chapter one sets out the background to, and context of, the research project and describes my reasons for wishing to study the work of classroom assistants in more depth. It also outlines the three phases of this study.

Chapter two examines the theoretical framework against which the study is set. It looks at the centrality of language in learning and current theories about the acquisition and development of literacy. This framework will be used to inform my analysis of assistants' own literacy backgrounds and their work with children. Chapter two also reviews the changing roles and responsibilities of classroom assistants and the increasing number that are being employed due to various educational initiatives.

Chapter three looks at the methodological issues involved in adopting an ethnographic approach and how it is hoped that by using the medium of triangulation a degree of reliability and validity can be ensured. This chapter also examines the ethical issues involved in undertaking a project which involves a questionnaire, the collection of school documents, interviews with assistants and observations of them working with children and the position of the researcher as both insider and outsider in the process. The justification for the three phases of the project is set out in this chapter.

Chapter four draws briefly on data collected during phase one, the pilot study of assistants' work in one primary school, and phase two, the questionnaire survey and general school observations and interviews. The questionnaire was devised, trialled, revised and circulated to the 39 primary schools in one area of the county. Observations of, and interviews with classroom assistants, were carried out in eight of the thirty-nine schools during the same period. Field notes from conferences, seminars and in-service training sessions are also used where relevant.

Chapter five analyses the detailed observations and interviews collected during phase three of the study, from the three core schools in another area of the county, one Key Stage 1 and two Key Stage 1 & 2 schools. This chapter examines the similarities and differences in the ways in which classroom assistants were deployed and managed in the schools and the different working practices they adopted when supporting children's acquisition of language and literacy. This includes the ways in which they drew upon their own language histories and personal practices when working with pupils

Chapter six summarises and draws together the findings, reviewing and evaluating the research process, and discussing the implications of the research for policy and practice in education.

CHAPTER TWO – THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Introduction

The acquisition and development of language and literacy is a complex matter and there is an enormous amount of research into how children learn to read and write and the sub-skills that need to be learned. Much of the research, both in Britain and abroad, has focused on two main areas:

a) how reading, writing and spelling are taught by teachers in schools, and
b) *the influence of home background on literacy attainment. (Gains* &Wray, 1995)

In addition, the works of Heath (1983), Taylor, (1994) and Barton & Hamilton (1998) highlighted the cultural and social aspects of literacy learning that may be overlooked in school based educational programmes.

In recent years the number of classroom assistants employed in British schools has increased and their role has changed from that of 'domestic helper' to 'assistant teacher' (Lee & Mawson, 1998). Assistants were recruited in order to support the introduction of the Code of Practice for children with Special Educational Needs (DfEE 1994) and the Green Paper 'Excellence for all Children' (DfEE 1997) encouraged schools to educate pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools. Whilst it is not the intention of this dissertation to focus primarily on pupils with special educational needs, these pupils' difficulties with language and literacy and their needs have influenced the policies and practices in schools, including the deployment of classroom assistants.

The introduction of the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE 1998) during the period of the research project, with its term-by-term Framework for Teaching, has seen an increase in the 'teaching' aspect of the role assistants perform in supporting a group of children during the Literacy Hour. The increase in the numbers of assistants working in schools has continued with the recruitment of assistants to deliver the Additional Learning Support materials (DfEE 1999). These materials were designed to support children

whose attainment in English Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) in Year 2 was at, or below 2C. (The average level for a 7-year-old pupil is a 2A or 2B). Assistants, as well as teachers, deliver these tightly structured lessons to groups of between 5 and 8 pupils. This has further emphasised, not only the crucial role assistants play in supporting children, but also the needs of the assistants if they are to fulfil the expectations placed upon them to raise standards. As indicated in chapter one, it also poses questions for heads and teachers about the management and training of para-professional staff, a point stressed by the recent DfEE (2000) consultation paper on the deployment and management of assistants.

In researching their role as 'assistant teachers' it is important to understand how classroom assistants support children's development of language and literacy in all its many and varied forms: their standing within the schools, their access to in-service training, and how their own language and literacy histories and personal practices affect, or are affected by, their work in schools.

Assistants may be the adults who will be expected to monitor children's learning and bridge the gap between home and school literacy practices. This raises a number of questions. For instance, how do assistants' own language and literacy histories and practices, values and beliefs, influence the support they provide? How consistent is this support with school policies? How do the tasks they undertake, and the support they get from teachers, vary across schools, classes or Key Stages? What do individual assistants understand to be the purpose of a particular literacy related activity? Results from the questionnaire suggest that a grasp of the purpose, or value, of particular activities can be very varied. These aspects of the research will be examined in more detail when looking at the data analysis in chapters 4 and 5.

In order to explore the ways in which classroom assistants support the development of language and literacy in mainstream primary schools, the following areas will be addressed:

1. Literature on the centrality of language to the process of teaching and learning.
2. Literature on the different approaches as to what counts as literacy, which includes literacy as social practice and how children are inducted into literacy practices.
3. Previous research on the role of the classroom assistant.

THE CENTRALITY OF LANGUAGE TO THE PROCESS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Introduction

All the classroom assistants interviewed as part of the research project lived close to the schools in which they worked. Information from field notes taken at conferences, in-service training courses and when talking to professional colleagues, indicates that this is generally the case as assistants' own children often attend the schools in which they work. Therefore, assistants who live in the local community, and work closely with individuals and groups of children on a regular basis are well placed to tap into the language resources of their 'pupils'. They may be able to recognise when the vocabulary and language structures used by the teacher or by a text are inaccessible to a child. In this way they may be well suited to mediating learning through language in a way that the teacher, with a large class to manage, cannot.

The centrality of language in school based learning

Few would dispute that the capacity to develop, understand, use and manipulate language goes hand in hand with intellectual development. Language is the essential tool for thinking. As Vygotsky (1994) wrote, "The child's intellectual growth is contingent upon his mastering the social means of thought, that is language." (p.47). He goes on to say:

> Real concepts are impossible without words, and thinking in concepts does not go beyond verbal thinking. That is why the central moment in concept formation, and it generative cause, is a specific use of words as functional 'tools'. (p.48).

Wood (1998) supports the Vygoskian view that language is central to communication and instruction in the development of children's thinking. As Wood states:

> Language and cognition are fused in verbal reasoning. Comprehension problems, which arise because children have yet to master specific features of language use and structure, act as a barrier to learning and understanding. Lacking expertise in the processes of creating a coherent, 'disembedded' or 'decontextualized' account of what they know and understand children may appear intellectually incompetent when, in reality, they are still grappling with the problem of making sense to other people. This process takes time and creates many challenges for both pupils and teachers. (p.180)

It may also lead to the adoption of theories about language, learning and literacy that are less than helpful, not only for the children, but in guiding assistants in the most productive ways of supporting both oracy and literacy.

Once a child enters school, language takes on a greater significance. It will be used, not only for instruction, but also to induct the child into the routines and contexts for learning that may differ from those encountered at home. The child will be one of many and, therefore, opportunities for the child to initiate learning within his or her own frame of reference may be limited.

Wells (1987), in his longitudinal study, recorded the language interactions of a group of children at home and school. He wanted to find out if there was a 'causal connection between socio-economic status, language

experience in the pre-school years, and educational achievement' (p.xi). He explored how a child learns the uses of language in their community and how this affects their 'fit' with the way language is used in school. At home many children learnt not only how to talk, but how to learn through talk. Teachers' perceptions of children's language abilities were often related to social class. However, leaving the social class issue aside Wells found that:

> ...for no child was the language experience of the classroom richer than that of the home – not even for those believed to be linguistically deprived. (p.86).

Although it varied from teacher to teacher, many activities were teacher dominated which did not allow for reciprocal language interactions. This situation was most evident in the whole class sessions – a form of teaching which is currently encouraged. Wells also warns against adults developing "at all costs" the "meaning they see in the situation" (p.100). He also raises the question of relevance, and, when a child seems to be following an irrelevant goal, asks, "irrelevant to whom?" Assistants would seem well placed to help children negotiate between home and school language practices and in my data I will give examples of children constructing meaning and relevance from an activity when working with an assistant.

Through talk children need to be able to make connections between their existing model of the world and the information that is being presented to them. Wells (1987) states:

> Teaching is essentially a matter of facilitating learning, and where that learning depends on communication between the teacher and learner, the same principles apply as in any successful conversation. The aim must be the *collaborative* construction of meaning, with negotiation to ensure that meanings are mutually understood. (p.101).

Wells goes on to look at the ways teachers have found to enable children to engage in collaborative meaning making. He suggests that teachers need to take children's perceived problems seriously, listen carefully to ensure

understanding of the intentions, pose questions that will extend thinking, and, whilst challenging, couch them in terms that the child can understand. The atmosphere in the classroom needs to be one which will encourage risk-taking. Knowledge whether through talk, texts or television has to be constructed anew by each individual child and children have different ways of doing this:

> The differences, (in what children can do) are of two basic kinds: difference in the children themselves, and differences in their environments – in the opportunities that are provided for learning. In the first category, we can include such factors as personality, learning style and general learning ability.....But as constructing the language system and discovering how to use it appropriately involve different types of learning, it is possible that there are differences between children here as well. Some may be particularly quick and successful in mastering the sound system, others at forming and testing the hypotheses necessary for constructing grammar, and still others at acquiring control of the functional uses of language. (p.129)

The increased use of classroom assistants to support groups of children engaged in language and literacy activities since Wells carried out his research in 1987, and how they use their knowledge of children's oral abilities, will be looked at closely when discussing the audio-tapes and observations of assistants working with children in chapters 4 and 5. Halliday (1979) stresses the cultural and social aspects of a child's language acquisition and development. The language children hear and use will shape their attitudes, values and beliefs and their ability to fit into new situations – most particularly school. In her handbook for classroom assistants on supporting language and literacy Clipson-Boyles (1996) stresses the significance of oracy, *the bridge between language and literacy* (my italics). She reiterates the theory expounded by Wells (1987) that

"language learning takes place when children are interacting with adults" (p.20). She goes on to suggest that assistants ask questions about the nature of talk under four main headings: thinking, learning, communicating and socialising and then examine their interactions with children to see where the balance between the functions lies (p.20/21). Clipson-Boyles also suggested that assistants are well placed to mediate language learning and that they could examine talk to see whether is was being used to explain, to recall, to find out by asking questions, to generate ideas or to report.

In the Language in the National Curriculum (LINC) reader, Carter (1990) stressed the need for teachers to broaden their knowledge about language in order to "better understand what to make explicit and what to leave implicit in pupil's own knowledge about language" (p.3). The National Literacy Strategy and the Additional Learning Support materials certainly try to make explicit the correct terminology to be used by both teachers and assistants in connection with the teaching of phonics, book knowledge – author, illustrator, blurb, index, etc. – and the range of text genres. In order for assistants to be able to support children's ways of speaking or use of the correct terminology they would need to understand what to do and how to do it. Examples from my data indicated that the range of assistants' knowledge and understanding was quite diverse. I consider the ways in which assistants used these diverse functions of talk in their interactions with children in chapters 4 and 5.

The relationship between spoken language, literacy and learning is well established. (Vygotsky, 1994, Meek, 1991, Wells, 1987 and Clipson-Boyles, 1996). In the next section I look at the relationship between opposing discourses on the teaching of literacy and the work of classroom assistants.

Introduction

In considering the work of classroom assistants with regard to debates about literacy and how it should be taught it is important to set the discussion in the cultural, social, political and educational climate of the time. Results from the questionnaires and interviews in my research show that the majority of assistants are women in their 40s or 50s, and married with children. They will, therefore, have lived through and brought up children during a period of almost continuous debate about standards of literacy and the most efficacious ways of teaching reading. How relevant they found the debate, especially if neither they, nor their children, had any difficulty in learning to read and write, and to what extent it affected their own language and literacy practices, may be difficult to discern. However, the importance of understanding the ways in which classroom assistants support the language and literacy work should not be under-estimated especially as they often work with individual pupils or groups of children who experience degrees of difficulty in acquiring literacy skills. Indeed, in one of the three schools which will be reported on in chapter 5, the teachers, satisfied that the assistants were competent, no longer contributed to the Additional Learning Support sessions as set out in the guidance (DfEE 1999). This meant that the four Additional Learning Support modules on remedial literacy work for children who achieved 2C or below in the Year 2 Standard Assessment Tasks were delivered entirely by classroom assistants

In order, therefore, to set the work of classroom assistants in the context of my research I will now discuss the debate about standards of English and the main approaches to the teaching of literacy that have been advocated over the last 30 years or so.

The teaching of literacy and the standards debate

The Bullock Report (DES 1974) raised questions of standards, the need to decide "what kind of English is right for our pupils" and the allegations

from employers regarding school leavers who "cannot write grammatically, are poor spellers, and generally express themselves badly." (p.3). Similar concerns were reported by Turner (1994), who stated that:

> There is now clear evidence that hundreds of thousands of British school children, south of a line from the Mersey to the Wash, are subject to a sharply downward trend in reading attainment at seven or eight. (p.111)

The target population for the Additional Learning Support materials, delivered mainly by classroom assistants, is pupils of eight and nine years of age.

The standards debate and issues about the correct way to teach literacy (and numeracy) have not abated in recent years as the evaluation of the National Literacy Project (NPL) clearly shows. In the report (Ofsted, 1998) HMI state, "The most significant weakness in all of the unsatisfactory lessons was in the teaching of word level work, especially phonics at Key Stage 1". This was attributed to "gaps in teachers' knowledge." (p.6). If there are these gaps in teachers' knowledge, one must ask what kind of a model is being presented to assistants who support children in this area. Examples of assistants working with 'phonic elements' will be discussed in later chapters.

Learning to be literate is a complex matter but the current debates about the standards pupils attain often focus on two main approaches, the "progressive, *bad,* as opposed to the traditional, *good,"* (Stierer 1994). The traditional approach generally emphasised the teaching of phonics – the representation of each phoneme by a letter, or series of letters, a grapheme. The phonic method came to be known as the 'bottom up' approach as it started with discrete units of sound and the letter which represented the sound and gradually built these into words. The progressive approaches stressed meaning and were associated with moves to use 'real books' that is, traditional children's storybooks, as opposed to reading schemes which may

have been based on building up a sight vocabulary through learning words on flashcards or using phonically based texts. Such schemes were criticised in the 1980s on the grounds of contrived language, the stereotyping of different cultures and genders and lack of interest and relevance to children. Methods which stressed meaning came to be known as the 'top down' approaches as they emphasised starting from the whole text or whole word, building on pupils' oral language skills and learning the discrete structure of individual words in the context of the language being used. However, HMI (1992) reported that the majority of teachers used a combination of methods in order to match the children's developing abilities in reading. Therefore, in order to contextualize assistants' work within the conflicting discourses about literacy and how it should be taught I now give a brief, historical overview of the debate. This will enable me to discuss data from the questionnaire, audio tapes, interviews and observations of assistants working with children and to examine any links between practice and beliefs.

As the majority of the assistants questioned as part in this study were in their 40s or 50s they will have learnt to read during the 1950s and 1960s when certain philosophies about becoming literate held sway. These will have been linked to the ideas, at that time, on how children learn. Graham and Kelly (1988) in their book aimed primarily at student teachers reported that whole word or 'look and say' and phonic approaches and sometimes a combination of both were dominant until the 1970s. Assistants recall of how they learned to read and write and any influences on their practices that can be detected will be discussed in later chapters.

Teaching reading – the 'top down' approach

During the 1970s and 1980s the work of the Goodmans (1976) and Smith (1986) ushered in the study of 'psycholinguistics'. There was a move away from approaches, which concentrated on discrete skills, to a 'whole language' approach. This led to approaches such as Breakthrough to

Literacy materials (McKay, ed., 1970) where the children's own dictated sentences together with books to accompany the scheme formed the basis of early reading material. The teaching of reading and writing were more closely linked. Assessment tools such as miscue analysis (Goodman 1988) were developed in order to diagnose the nature of a reader's strengths and weakness and plan an appropriate programme. The approaches, which were being developed and the materials that accompanied them, reflected the awareness of the active nature of children as learners and the need to build on their oral language skills. (Graham & Kelly, 1998).

Thompson (1979) in her guide for parents and teachers stated, "My philosophy is that you learn to read by reading" (p.9). She went on to plead for more time to be spent on reading, that the teaching of reading be seen as more than a 'mechanical ability' and for the materials presented to learners to be "interesting, relevant and of high quality" (p.9). This theme was echoed by Meek (1988) in 'How Texts Teach What Readers Learn', she states that in a literate society 'reading and writing are obvious social things to do'. (p.6) She went on to say:

> Many early reading skills can be missed by teachers whose training has been strictly geared to 'schooling' literacy; they sometimes undervalue what the children have already discovered about writing and reading. (p.7)

Assistants, who have frequent contact with small groups of children, are in a good position to notice what children have already discovered about reading and writing.

Teaching reading – the 'bottom-up' approach

In 'Why Johnny Can't Read' Flesch (1955), argued that because teachers were using a 'whole word' method of teaching using flashcards and repetitive texts which stressed word recognition rather than the teaching of sound/symbol association in a systematic way, children were failing to learn to read. Much of the criticism regarding phonics instruction is based on the

lack of simple sound/symbol correspondence given that there are only 26 letters to represent 44 speech sounds. In addition, the pronunciation of individual letters or sequences of letters is affected by the surrounding letters, e.g. the 'ar' in park and parent.

More recent research (Bryant and Bradley, 1985, and Goswami, 1995) suggests that the acquisition of phonemic awareness is a more complex matter than just matching symbol to sound. Their research focused attention on children's sensitivity to rhyme and alliteration as strong indicators of future success in learning to read and write. Many children will come to school already having developed this sensitivity to rhyme through hearing nursery rhymes, poems and songs and those children who have developed good rhyming skills can often make the links between one word and another at the onset and rime level. For instance, they can use their knowledge of rime analogies to help them read a new word with the same spelling pattern, c + at = cat, therefore, h + at = hat. During my research I have frequently observed assistants using published programmes based on the use of rime analogies with groups of pupils who are experiencing a degree of difficulty in learning to read and I will comment upon these interactions in chapters 4 and 5.

However, the debate about phonics and the best way to teach grapheme phoneme correspondence, even though there has been a great deal of research in this area for several decades, has not been resolved. The focus has now shifted to the advantages of teaching analytical, i.e. breaking words up into their constituent sounds as opposed to synthetic phonics, i.e. assembling words from the letters that make up the word. Adams (1990) in her research into early reading development stresses the complex nature of learning to read and write and that many factors, including listening to stories and being aware of print, contribute to a child's progress regardless of the instructional approach adopted. With regard to developing phonemic awareness she found that two abilities were good predictors of later success.

Firstly, the ability to recognise and name upper and lower case letters and secondly, the ability to use rime analogies, which hold true at both single word and syllable level. However, McGuinness (1998) believes that children fail to learn to read and write adequately because they are taught synthetic as opposed to analytical phonics. She stresses that the scientific research into reading indicates that phonemes are the basis for the writing system in English. Therefore children should not be taught the letter names nor the word families that can be generated using onset and rime. She sets out a programme indicating that reading and writing should be taught using, "A true linguistic programme in which the phoneme *linked to the appropriate grapheme* – (my italics) is the basic unit for teaching the writing system." (p.319).

In line with the work of Adams, Bryant (1993) concluded that:

> Teachers have to make sure that children are aware of phonological connections in reading. These connections will be important for them on at least two levels, - the intrasyllabic units and the phoneme. It is plain that children are more likely to need help with conquering the phoneme than learning how to use their already considerable knowledge of onset and rime. But the now undoubted need to teach children about phonemes and grapheme-phoneme correspondence should not obscure the educational significance of the larger speech units. (p.94)

I would suggest that building words using onset and rime, and being made aware of syllable, helps children in a way which grapheme-phoneme correspondence does not. It gives them units of language that can be linked to meaning – cat, bat, rat, etc., are all items which can be labelled. Playing orally with syllables, alliteration and rhyme helps children manipulate language at a level that most can understand and enjoy. It helps them stabilise the vowel sound within a word, demonstrates serial probability in

English and prepares them for the more difficult task of learning which grapheme represents a phoneme in a given word – an important skill for encoding (spelling) when the support of the surrounding text is unavailable. For children, the ability to recognise and use analogy has wider uses than just predicting from a known rime how to decode other words with the same pattern. Analogy can be used to see similarities and differences in many situations. An understanding of words at this level will probably also help assistants (and teachers) grasp the terminology associated with the National Literacy Strategy and the Additional Learning Support materials. Examples of some of the confusions encountered by children and assistants over terminology will be offered in later chapters.

The texts produced for learner readers using either a systematic phonic approach or 'look and say' whole word approaches were also criticised on the grounds of stilted language. Ashworth (1988) suggests that the decontextualized and disembedded nature of instruction, with the emphasis on 'getting the words' rather than being concerned with the 'language' only supports those children whose oral language skills are strongest. The growth in recruitment of assistants to support pupils with Special Educational Needs suggests that they may be the adults supporting pupils whose oral language skills are the weakest.

Criticisms of the 'whole language' or meaning making approach focused on the limited access for learner readers to a strategy for decoding or encoding unfamiliar words. Without an understanding of the alphabetical nature of written English, the learner reader would have to master each individual word in the lexicon as a separate item. Whereas it might be possible to use one's oral language, knowledge of texts and the specific context to decode an unknown word, there would be no supporting context when it came to spelling. However, the advantages of the whole language approach, beginning with a text – often a story – introduces the child to the enjoyment of reading. Dombey (1995) argues that not only new words, but also new

syntactic forms and meanings are learnt from listening to texts. Thus the child, when he or she comes to read a text to an adult, teacher, parent or classroom assistant, already has an appreciation of how the text works. Reading and writing are seen as interlinked. An adult will scribe for a child and in so doing will demonstrate letter formation, word spacing and correct spelling and be able to offer the child feedback on what has been written. Once children have mastered the basic elements of reading and writing the issues of comprehension and composition take on a higher priority. Wray (1995) stressed the need for reciprocal teaching in order to develop children's comprehension skills, and suggests that:

> ...teacher modelling, encouraging self-questioning and explicit discussion of comprehension processes are all beneficial teaching activities in their own right. (p.45)

This reciprocity may also help a child see another purpose in writing apart from communicating over time and space, that is, to see writing as a way of reflecting on one's ideas, thoughts and feelings and those of others. It was suggested at one of the National Literacy Strategy training sessions for teachers that having assistants in the classroom when the teacher 'modelled' reading and writing activities could act as powerful in-service training for assistants. (National Literacy Strategy 5-Day Training Courses, summer 1998.)

Czerniewska (1992) explores the development of children's writing in a range of genres, their beliefs about what writing is for and the audience that they are addressing. She makes the important point that language development is not linear but recursive, and should, therefore, be seen as a 'process'. But such a process should not include an uncritical acceptance of whatever a child produces regardless of content, style and stereotyping. How assistants view the support they offer pupils when supporting writing will be examined in chapter 4.

Of course, as the HMI (1992) report indicated, teachers tended to use a mix of methods rather than to follow religiously a strictly 'bottom up phonic' or 'top down meaning making' approach. Even if teachers adopt one methodology to the exclusion of any other there are other influences on a child's acquisition and development of literacy. For most children school based learning does not provide their only introduction to literacy. Children will have been exposed to print in their environment and many will have learnt to recognise brand names and logos, listened to stories and rhymes, and learnt some of the conventions of print before attending school. It would, in any case, be almost impossible to impose a 'pure' approach to fit one or other of the opposing discourses. The materials which accompany any method for teaching young children will contain picture and context cues and will be accompanied by instruction and questioning. The ways in which classroom assistants mediate pupils' learning will be discussed in chapters 4 and 5

Teaching reading – the cueing systems

The National Literacy Strategy (1998) was introduced in order to provide a national framework for the teaching of literacy in order to address concerns about standards. Although a high priority is given to the teaching of phonics the strategy stresses the need for a reader to 'orchestrate' the four cueing systems: semantic, syntactic, phonic (sounds and spelling), word recognition and graphic knowledge. An efficient and effective reader needs to draw on their knowledge of the language, which in young children will be based on their oral language experiences, and the alphabetic principle in order to decode and understand what they are reading. In addition, it can be argued that a reader needs to be aware of what Hunter-Grundin (1979) describes as the 'situational cueing system'. That is knowledge about our society, its culture and the conventions that surround different text genres (p.8). Assistants' knowledge and understanding of national as well as school policies and practices and how they can draw on their own language and

literacy resources when working with pupils will be a crucial element in children's progress.

The influence of home literacy practices

A well-researched aspect of literacy that has received little mention in the National Literacy Strategy, and that does not feature greatly in either the phonics or whole language discourse, is the situational or social aspect of literacy. This is an important aspect as the assistants' language and literacy practices might match those of the pupils they support more closely than those of the teachers.

A considerable range of literature has demonstrated the importance of children's home literacy practices in relation to learning literacy at school. Although there is some reference to the needs of children with English as an Addition Language (EAL) in the National Literacy Strategy policy documents, the cultural and social diversity of the population and the language and literacy practices that they have developed are not acknowledged in any depth. Teachers are encouraged to use fiction text from a wide range of cultures in term 2 throughout years 1-5, but this may not be relevant to, nor necessarily reflect the literacy histories and practices, or oral traditions, experienced at home by many children.

In carrying out the current research project I wanted to investigate the ways and the contexts in which classroom assistants drew on their own language histories and personal practices to support children engaged in language and literacy tasks, hypothesising that these may be different from those used by the teachers and closer to those used in the local community. In doing this I drew on a seminal piece of research by Heath (1983, 1988, 1994) who focused on the literacy practices of white and African American families in three different communities: the mainstream or townspeople and the inhabitants of Roadville and Tracton.

In what she describes as 'mainstream ways', Heath focuses on the literacy practices which the townspeople's children experience at home and how this middle class community closely reflects the type of literacy they will meet in school. The form of questioning as stories are read, the nature of 'book talk', children's acceptance of books and book related activities as entertainment and the gradual, but early expectation that children will "listen and wait as an audience, all help to develop ways of decontextualising and surrounding with explanatory prose the knowledge gained from selective attention to objects." (p.79). The bedtime stories, nursery rhymes and ways of taking meaning from texts all support school learning. Families, in the way they interact with their children, both orally and over print, prepare them for the world of work. Mainstreamers are expected to have the necessary skills in retrieving and organising both written and spoken information to enable them to carry out their professional roles.

Although, in the other two communities Heath studied, the inhabitants of Roadville and Tracton are keen for their children to succeed at school and see a 'good education' as a way of improving their living standards, neither in the community nor in the world of work do their home literacy practices prepare children so successfully for the demands of school. In Roadville white working class children would, on the surface seem to share many of the educational advantages that are the preserve of the Maintown group. "Reading and reading related activities occur most frequently before naps or at bedtime." (p.81) The development of phonological awareness is supported by "adults reciting nursery rhymes" (p.80) and, initially the children do well in their early acquisition of literacy skills. Heath describes the three overlapping stages parents use to introduce their children to print and its uses: firstly, naming shapes, colours and simple items in books; in the next stage they encourage children to listen, without interrupting, to stories. Adults expect children to offer specific answer to questions, and

finally, in preparation for school, they are offered workbooks to colour and write in neatly. They know how to, and are used to, listening to stories and adult instructions and questions. However, they will not have been prepared for the types of questions asked in school, the type which help them move knowledge learned in one context and shift it to another. Indeed, an invitation to tell a 'story' is likely to make a child feel uncomfortable as they associate 'telling stories' with 'telling lies'. Even when the scene has been set for a 'fictive' story, the children are likely to adhere to "certain details of real life behaviour." (p.164). "They are unable to decontextualize their knowledge or fictionalize events known to them and shift them into other frames." (p.83). Talk about schoolwork relates to appearance rather than content. Talk at home emphasises the need to 'do things right', and little attention is given to talking through a sequence of steps in order to build or make something. Children are expected to watch, imitate and practice skills needed to carry out a task. Heath, (1983) reports that "Adults expect the school to teach, and the children to learn" (p.230).

In the third community, the black working class Trackton children experience an entirely different mode of being language users, in both the oral and written sense:

> Tracton children have no books....reading for Tracton children is reading to learn what they need to know before they go to school to be successful in their community. (p.233)

The social and cultural interactions of home, plaza, stores and the influence of the church, mean that although the sense of the written word may be retained, the way any written message is delivered or interpreted will *suit the occasion* rather than retain absolute accuracy. Children are expected to 'come to know.' As Heath (1994) reports:

> Children are expected to learn how to know when the form belies the meaning, and to know contexts of items and to use their understanding of these contexts to draw parallels

between items and events. Parents do not believe they have a tutoring role in this learning; they provide the experiences on which the child draws and reward signs of their successfully coming to know. (p.87).

Because the children expect the listener to 'know' the situation in which a given narrative takes place, events are not decontextualized. There is a heavy emphasis on 'contextualized nonverbal and verbal language', and the exploration of texts to gain meaning through group rather than individual access. An important aspect of the 'ways of taking' is that:

> Print in isolation bears little authority in their world. The kind of questions asked of reading books is unfamiliar. The children's abilities to metaphorically link two events or situations and to recreate scenes are not tapped in the school: in fact, these *abilities often cause difficulties,* because they enable children to see parallels the teachers did not intend and indeed, may not recognise until the children point them out. (p.90)

Heath's work throws a different perspective on some of the arguments surrounding the teaching of language and literacy by looking at the range of reading, writing, speaking, listening and questioning that children experience at home and the match or mismatch between these and school. In Roadville and Trackton the language practices of the home are, in more or less subtle ways, different to those in school. The 'ways of taking' meaning from texts that are learnt pre-school mean that pupils from some communities encounter strange and alien practices in school, and without an appreciation on the school's part as to how children have been inducted into literacy at home, the children are unable to bridge the gap.

Weinberger (1995) extended the work of Heath by researching the literacy practices of a group of parents in England and the interaction and advice they received from their children's schools. She concluded that:

"it would be beneficial for children's literacy development if schools found ways of increasing dialogue between teachers and *all parents."(my italics)* as:

> ....most of the ways in which parents interact with their children on literacy are intuitive and come from well-embedded child-rearing practices within homes and social networks. (p.200)

The other 'significant adult' especially in KS1, and perhaps more so now in KS2 since the introduction of the Additional Learning Support materials, is likely to be a classroom assistant, who will bring her own cultural, social and linguistic resources into play when supporting children's learning. The assistant, like the child, will have to negotiate her 'role' in each classroom and with each teacher. The policies and practices of the school may support her to a greater or lesser degree. The perceived 'status' of the assistant within the school team may also have an effect. These points will be explored further in chapters 4 and 5.

Barton and Hamilton (1998) explore the influence of 'multiplicities of literacies', and put forward the view, not dissimilar to Heath's that:

> More complex views (of literacy) have developed out of dissatisfaction with purely psychological characterisations of reading and writing as autonomous skills.....These studies contribute to ways of talking about literacy, which properly acknowledge its situated nature and therefore offer the possibility of representing the multiplicities of literacies, which exist in any culture. Potentially these studies can contribute to public and education debate by providing an alternative discourse of literacy. However, much public discussion and political debate still draws upon and supports the simplistic views of literacy, which treats it as an autonomous skill. The media narrative on literacy is an

> autonomous one, focusing largely on methods of teaching and learning and *attributing blame.* (my italics) (p.20)

They go on to discuss the 'social practices account of literacy', in a particular area of Lancaster, the influence of a wide variety of religious institutions and the need to consider the linguistic experiences children bring to the specialised context of school. At home, in contrast to school, literacy practices are rarely separated from use. Another, perhaps rarely considered aspect is the range of networks which support or constrain the literacy practices of individuals and families and the range of texts both dominant and vernacular which 'count as literacy' and could be drawn upon by schools to support children's learning. An example of the home literacy practice of an assistant being used with children in school will be discussed in chapter 4.

Teachers, therefore, and the assistants who work under their direction, may have to deal with three distinct ways of becoming literate at home. The 'mainstream one', with which teachers are most familiar, the Roadville adherence to behaving well and 'getting it right' and the Trackton relish for performance and embroidery of oral or written situations. As assistants are drawn from a wide range of educational, social and cultural backgrounds their own literacy practices may reflect a variety of 'ways of taking' which could be used to support children's learning. If teachers fail to recognise, or are unaware of how their modes of teaching fail to match the modes of learning of their pupils they will not be able to pass this knowledge on to the assistants. Indeed, the assistants may be in a better position to support children's language and literacy learning through their frequent, direct experiences of literacy practices in their local community. This may apply to an even greater extent when assistants are drawn from the same ethnic minority groups as the pupils they support, though this is not an area I am exploring within this dissertation.

The standards debate – a contemporary issue

During the four years over which data has been gathered for my research, the National Literacy Strategy has had a great impact on what is taught and when it is taught. The swing between a phonics and language experience approach, as described by Adams (1990) no longer occupies the headlines to such a large extent, although as described earlier, debates about the efficacy of analytic as opposed to synthetic phonics still continues. Much of the debate appears to have focused on the early stages of learning to read, whether this applies to children just starting school or those who have difficulty in acquiring literacy skills. The work of the Goodmans (1988) and Smith (1986) who stressed the 'search for meaning' and the ongoing work of Goswami (1988 –1999a) who focused on the structure of the language – phonological, morphological and analogous, are not so very far apart. Both see communication and the ability to interpret and manipulate language as the prime function of oracy and literacy. The proponents of a traditional phonic approach, such as Turner, appear to see decoding and encoding as the end product. Stierer (1994), however, questions whether it matters if children, in the search for meaning in texts:

> ...develop the ability to decipher unseen decontextualized print at a later stage than children introduced to reading through the acquisition of decoding skills. (p.137).

The debate about reading standards and the phonics v. whole language approaches to the teaching of reading and writing was never quite so divergent as might first be supposed, as many groups supported variations of either a skills based or psycholinguistic model of understanding reading (Fox, 1991). Some of the terms used to describe approaches may have been less than helpful. A 'psycholinguistic guessing game' suggests that there is an element of chance in a reader understanding the meaning of a writer, rather than the reader 'questioning' what the writer is saying at a number of levels: letter, word, sentence and text in order to understand and perhaps challenge the message. A 'skills based approach' may be seen as dull, decontextualized, rote learning rather than something that can be learned

through alliterative sentences, playing with onset and rime and finding letter patterns in environmental print and children's names. The introduction of the 'real books' movement - Campbell (1992) suggests the term 'literature-based learning' might have been better and more accurate - started out in order to counteract the stilted language and gender and culture stereotyping of some scheme books. As new theories about literacy learning developed publishers produced new materials offering the teacher a wider range of more interesting and relevant tools with which to teach. However, if assistants are asked to support only the skills based elements of learning that Moyles (1997) suggests they are best able to do, they might not appreciate the wider 'whole language' needs of the children with whom they work.

Heath's research indicated that the Roadville children, who appeared to share the advantages of the mainstream pupils, made good progress with the initial stages of school literacy. This suggests that early skills based learning of phonics had been mastered, they were able to 'get the words right'. It was the inability to 'decontextualize their knowledge and fictionalize events known the them and shift them into other frames' (p83) that prevented them from acquiring 'mainstream' literacy.
Emerging from this discussion is the need to match the teaching to the child's developing needs. Vygotsky (1994) argues that in order to help a child progress work needs to be done in the 'zone of proximal development'. This means that the teacher (or assistant) needs to establish *not what a child can do independently but what that child can do with some assistance.* In order to establish the 'zone of proximal development' it may be necessary to know about the cultural and social aspects of a child's learning.

The National Literacy Strategy stresses the need for children to be able to 'orchestrate' the phonic, graphic, syntactic and contextual cues. (DfEE 1998) However the social context of literacy, which especially in relation to traveller children and pupils with English as an Additional Language, (EAL)

may have a significant impact on their ability to access 'school literacy'. The question of relevance in the context of the literacy histories and practices of the children's communities does not appear to have been addressed. Literacy in any society is not something that remains static. It is influenced by cultural, social and technological changes. To look back to some supposed 'golden age' of literacy denies the opportunities presented by television – a medium shared by almost all – word processing, the internet and the ability to produce, relatively cheaply, printed matter on every conceivable subject. There are many influences on a child's learning: health, economic, cultural and social status, and sense of identity within school and the home community and educational opportunity. Pollard and Filer (1996) explored the social world of children's learning between the ages of four and seven (an age group consistently supported by assistants in the project schools) using a case study approach. They look at how and if teachers 'scaffold' children's learning, not only in the academic sense but also in supporting the coping strategies children need to become part of the school environment. The book stresses the social aspects of learning within schools, not only with the teachers but also with their peers. Classroom assistants also support the academic, emotional and social elements of a child's learning, as this study will show. They play games with children to encourage 'turn-taking', encourage children in a group to listen to each other's views and they reiterate and clarify instructions from the teacher to help children complete tasks. Pollard and Filer (1996) emphasised that how a child views his or herself in relation to classmates and siblings, in regard to academic and athletic achievement and social status, matters. The experiences children had with different teachers and how these mirrored home expectations, also mattered. They concluded that the self-motivation, confidence and strategic resources which children bring to learning and how teachers *(and assistants – my italics)* and parents, support the learning stance of the pupils is important.

Donaldson (1993) endorses the view that children need a range of literacy experiences in school, both fiction and non-fiction, embedded and disembedded, which build upon the literacy practices of home and extends them to ensure that children begin to develop "impersonal modes of thought early," but which "never fails to respect them as individual learners." (p.57). An assistant whose children socialise with their classmates outside school, will probably be aware of the current craze and favourite TV programmes and other activities that children are pursuing in the community.

The National Literacy Strategy and classroom assistants

In the three core schools now that the National Literacy Strategy has settled down some flexibility has crept into the structure of the literacy hour. However, it is worth noting that assistants in several schools, whilst I was carrying out my research, expressed concern about their changing roles. They felt that being required to support groups of children or police the class while the teacher devoted time to the 'guided group' was diverting them from supporting individual pupils where, in some instances, they may have used their own idiosyncratic ways of supporting children's literacy learning. Assistants have also expressed concern about 'controlling' a group or a class. This is particularly relevant as the latest consultative paper from the DfEE (2000) suggests:

> Freeing up the teacher to work with groups.
> Where the teacher is satisfied that the TA (teaching assistant) is sufficiently confident and accomplished the TA can address the whole class for a time according to plans made in advance with the teacher. This enables the teacher to concentrate on pupils who need special attention, thereby ensuring that such pupils benefit from the direct input of the qualified teacher. (p.9)

However, observations carried out during my research and information from teaching colleagues confirm that, generally speaking, it is assistants who

offer the greatest amount of support to children with special educational needs, a finding also reported by the NUT (1998).

Whilst this is not the place to offer an appraisal of the National Literacy Strategy and its philosophical stance, there are four points I feel it is important to make. Firstly, the strategy, in spite of a heavy emphasis on word level work and phonics, does embrace a broader view of literacy than a simple ability to decode. It recognises that background knowledge, both of the subject matter and of how different text genres work, is important. Secondly, there is a danger that the use of excerpts from books will lead to a fragmented approach to texts, especially at KS2, when the whole book or story may never be read to, or with, the class. Dadds (1999) in her report on teachers' values and the literacy hour expressed similar concerns. In KS1 it is possible to dwell too long on a well-known story thus losing the interest and motivation of the children. In view of the enormous amount of literature on the power of the story (Meek, 1991, Fox 1993, Grainger 1998) this could be counterproductive. Thirdly, as Piotrowski & Reason (2000) report, "the pace and momentum (in introducing the structured phonics teaching in KS1 – for all but the fastest pupils) presents many teachers, children and their parents with considerable demands" (p.53). It is likely to be classroom assistants who will support 'the slowest children' and any concerns they express will need to be addressed. Lastly, although the National Literacy Strategy stresses the need to keep parents informed and reassured about the way in which literacy is now being taught, it does not explicitly address the question of a mismatch between home and school literacy practices. Taylor (1994) who focuses on the community aspect of language when reporting on her research into Family Literacy, writes:

> In each family, some rituals and routines of written language usage appear to conserve family traditions of literacy, while others appear to change the patterns of the past. The patterns of family literacy are constantly evolving to accommodate the everyday experiences of both parents

> and children. In analysing the data it has become increasingly evident that most significant 'modes' of transmitting literacy styles and values occurs indirectly, at the very margins of awareness through the continuously diffuse use of written language in the ongoing life of the family. The direct transmission of literacy styles and values through specific encounters occurs less frequently, and such didactic occasions are spasmodic, usually occurring in response to some school-related situation. (p. 58).

An example of an assistant 'modifying' her way of reading to children at home in response to her work in school will be reflected upon in chapter 5.

Dadds (1999) in her research paper into teachers' views about the literacy hour reported their concerns that if the National Literacy Strategy is interpreted in too narrow a way this may limit practice whereas some teachers in the enquiry believed that:

> Children's cultural linguistic resources should be honoured by teachers, represented within the literacy curriculum and drawn upon in scaffolding children's new literacy learning in school (p.13).

Conclusion

Learning to read and write makes many demands, not only on the children, but also on those who teach and support them. A brief review of some of the vast range of literature on how children learn to read and write has examined the conflict and confusion between various different theories and the divergent approaches which imply different concepts of literacy and how it should be taught. A broad view takes in the situational aspects of literacy. It sees literacy as being related to the social, cultural, educational and economic patterns of life in a community. The purpose of school literacy is to expand and extend the multiplicity of literacy practices of a community – but not to replace them, as literacy is not a static product but a

changing process, which needs to adapt to the demands placed upon it. The values and beliefs this philosophy embraces recognises that there are many routes to literacy, some of which may not be valued by the dominant, or 'school' literacy, adherents.

What may be termed the 'traditional' approach focuses on a narrow, decoding and encoding view of literacy, which is generally associated with the early stages of learning to read. There is no consensus as to the best way of teaching phonics as recent debates have illustrated and, in any case, most children learn to read whatever initial teaching method is employed. It is the later disembedded and decontextualized learning that children, whose home practices do not stress these aspects of literacy, fail to master and whose standards of literacy do not match that which a modern technological society demands.

The stance individual classroom assistants adopt regarding the 'bottom-up' v. 'top-down' dichotomies over the acquisition and development of language and literacy may affect what they see as important in the support they offer children. It is likely that their beliefs and values regarding how children learn to read and write, and how they extend children's learning during and beyond the initial stages, will be mediated by school policies and practices, any training they receive and opportunities to use a range of resources and literacy activities. In later chapters I will discuss the data from the audio-tapes of assistants working with children in order to analyse what they do and how they do it in relation to specific activities.

THE CHANGING ROLE OF CLASSROOM ASSISTANTS

Introduction

The change in the role of the classroom assistant, which was noted in the HMI (1992) report, from 'ancillary worker' to 'teaching assistant' has continued as further Government initiatives have been introduced. These have often been related to the inclusion of pupils with a range of academic,

physical, sensory and emotional, special educational needs. Lee & Mawson (1998) reported that in 1997 over 24,000 (full-time equivalent) classroom assistants were employed in mainstream English primary and secondary schools. Since that report the number of assistants employed has continued to rise and is set to rise by a further 20,000 full-time equivalents by 2001 (Marr, TES 28.04.00). The traditional role of classroom assistants as 'infant helpers' to support the teacher in caring for the youngest children has changed from that of 'domestic helper' to 'assistant teacher'. (Clayton, 1993, Haigh, 1999). The teaching role has increased further as the support assistants offer children during the literacy and numeracy hours has now become an established part of the curriculum in primary schools. (Fox & Halliwell, 2000). These changes raise several issues, which will be discussed in relation to the research questions.

The work of classroom assistants in supporting children's learning

The over-riding aim of my research was to investigate what assistants do to support children's development of language and literacy: whether this is reflected in school policy documents; job descriptions; the training they receive; the records they keep of the work they do with children and what type of feedback they receive from the teacher with whom they work; and how they draw on their own personal literacy practices to support children's learning. Clayton, (1993) reported that:

> The role of the British classroom assistant has developed over the last quarter of a century from one of care and housekeeping to now include substantial involvement in the learning process itself. Today's classroom assistant, particularly those working in mainstream schools with children with special educational needs, could well describe themselves as 'assistant teachers'. However, one should add, in caution that they serve in a supportive capacity under the day-to-day supervision of the class teachers whose role also seems to be changing to that of 'classroom

> manager'. In such a scenario, clear job descriptions are essential, as is the provision of adequate built-in time for teachers to enable them to brief and support the assistants and also monitor and evaluate their work. (p. 42).

In a survey entitled 'Jills of All Trades?...' Moyles (1997) in collaboration with the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) carried out a survey into the work of classroom assistants in KS1 classes. Over 300 questionnaires were sent to a sample of KS1 teachers, classroom assistants and specialist teacher assistants in 10 Local Education Authorities in England. Detailed observations in 15 schools, including video-taping and time-sampling, were carried out alongside semi-structured interviews with 15 observed teachers, assistants and headteachers together with 60 children during the summer and autumn terms 1995. Of the 81 assistants who answered the questionnaire 67 were aged between 31 and 50 years of age. Formal qualifications ranged from Nursery Nurse to degree level or equivalent. Fifty-six held the General Certificate of Secondary Education. All the assistants were female. One aspect the research investigated was the difference that assistants with the Specialist Teacher Assistant qualification were able to make to children's learning, over and above that of assistants without such training. The report represents an account of research into the working roles and relationships of KS1 personnel and the effects of these upon some aspects of the quality of children's learning. Moyles principal findings were:

- classroom assistants' roles are diverse, disparate and mainly reactive;
- relationships are based on implicit rather than explicit expectations;
- there is insufficient time spent on communication about responsibilities between teachers and assistants;
- teachers need training to understand how to lead support teams;
- there is a dilemma between the old ancillary role of supporting teachers and the new assistant role in supporting children;

- there are differences in perceptions of assistants' roles in dealing with children with special educational needs;
- larger numbers of classroom assistants are being employed to compensate for escalating class sizes and increased numbers of statemented children;
- there is an emphasis within primary schools on the products of children's learning at the expense of processes including play;
- classroom assistants have insufficient opportunities to be involved in important planning processes.

The report stressed that teaching is a complex activity and related this to Grundy's theory of curriculum: 1. Technical which concentrates on skills – which might be linked to the phonic element of a literacy programme. 2. Practical which results in understanding – the ability to comprehend texts at more than the literal level. 3. Emancipatory which results in critical awareness and the ability to make and use knowledge – the ability to retrieve, evaluate and organise and use information from texts in other contexts. Moyles (1997) indicated that teaching at a technical level is all than can be expected of any classroom assistant, especially without training. She suggests that:

> 'decisions will need to be taken in schools as to how possible it is to select certain elements of 'teaching' which are considered appropriate for a support worker to do under the guidance of a qualified teacher'. (p.99).

The need for such decisions may be even more imperative if assistants are, as indicated, expected to play an increasingly important role in raising standards of literacy and numeracy.

Apart from general welfare, which is almost exclusively directed towards very young children, most of the literature on the role of classroom assistants focuses on their work with:

a) children with special educational needs, both learning and emotional and behavioural needs. (Pothecary & McCarthy, 1996; Connell & Rennie, 1997: Lorenz 1998: and Fox 1998).
b) recruitment, training and management of assistants. (Clipson-Boyles, 1998; Lee & Mawson, 1998; NUT, 1998; Balshaw, 1999).

In 1998 Lee & Mawson, on behalf of the public service union UNISON, sent a questionnaire to 1,284 primary schools. The results in their report were based on 549 replies.

The aim of their survey was to elicit information on three main areas of interest:

1. conditions of employment
2. training and staff development
3. job satisfaction

Contracts of employment varied. Some assistants had permanent contracts, others temporary contracts. Salaries were low. A full-time assistant could expect to earn around £7,000.00 per annum. It was rare for an experienced assistant, or one who had gained a job-related qualification such as the Specialist Teacher Assistant certificate, to earn more than a recent recruit. Most assistants had a positive view of their job. However, they would like to have access to training, with course fees and release time to attend lectures, paid for by their employers. They would also like qualifications to be reflected in their pay packets.

One of their main findings was that 77% of assistants support the teacher, in both KS1 and KS2, by working with a small group within the class suggesting that the assistants' role has "developed to include substantial involvement in the learning process itself." (p.17). In order to use assistants more effectively, resources needed to be available in order to support training, recognise experience and qualifications and for time to be made available for assistants and teachers to plan together.

The NUT (1998) report arrived at similar conclusions in relation to the work of assistants. The report examined the work of a wide range of 'associate staff' in both primary and secondary schools. These included clerical, secretarial, technicians, librarians and bursars, as well as classroom and learning support assistants. The report identified three main factors for the increase in associate staff since the 1988 Education Reform Act:

1. The pressure on school budgets has led to a decrease in teaching staff and to compensate, an increase in less expensive associate staff, who are 'often seen as the most easily dispensable'.
2. The increase in the number of pupils with Special Educational Needs in mainstream schools together with the reduction in central support staff for learning and behavioural difficulties.
3. Shortages of skilled teachers in some curriculum areas, particularly in secondary schools, has led to associate staff being employed for a variety of non-teaching, supervisory and instructor roles.

The report found that there was "no national point of reference or framework" for the way that assistants were deployed. (p.6). At one end of the spectrum they may be used to undertake tasks such as: photocopying, putting up displays, hearing children read or dealing with minor injuries and spillages, whilst at the other, assistants were being used, as part of a planned partnership, to help with differentiation, manage a group within the class and to allow additional help to be given to groups or individual pupils. Fieldwork for the report during the summer term 1998 suggested that planning and training for the literacy hour "built in the role of the classroom assistant as a natural element in the way the hour was to be managed." (p.7) The NUT (1998) report made a distinction between the role of the classroom assistant and that of the learning support assistant and stated that the latter may be used to support the learning needs of statemented pupils or

those on Stages 1 – 3 of the Code of Practice for Pupils with Special Educational Needs.

In carrying out their research the NUT examined the range of ways associate staff were used in other countries and found that some of our neighbours had experiences similar to our own. They also found that, in England, there was little in the way of good practice guidance owing to the diverse ways in which individual schools used assistants and the lack of any central orchestration. The report described the features that contributed to effective practice in primary schools and included:

- A specific policy which described assistants' roles and their working relationships in school.
- Their status as members of the staff should be reflected in the use of the staff room, inclusion in staff training days and the development of policies, dedicated paid time to discuss their role with teachers and plan and review their work, and involvement in the extra–curricular activities at the school's expense.
- Explicit job descriptions.
- Consistency of support for pupils or teachers, e.g. 3 hours per day, per class.
- Clear management structures which view the assistant as part of a professional team.

The report also indicated that few schools have problems recruiting assistants, many of who will be parents of children at the particular school and may have served as lunchtime supervisors or in a voluntary capacity. In spite of the low wages schools often receive more applications for classroom assistants than they do for teachers. Most assistants live close to the school in which they work. Few schools set minimum standards of education when recruiting assistants. Schools in the most educationally disadvantaged areas may, therefore, recruit assistants whose own educational standards are insufficient to enable them to support children's acquisition of basic skills. In the more advantaged areas schools are able to

recruit well-qualified staff and some use the experienced gained as a route into teaching. As reported in the HMI Report (1992) schools do not always exploit the skills of well-qualified assistants to the full. My research indicates that in some schools this is still the case. I will discuss the ways assistants reported being used in relation to their skills in chapters 5 and 6.

The report, whilst reporting on a range of issues on the deployment of associate staff, did not give any examples of how assistants supported learning in the primary classroom. This is an area my research seeks to address in relation to language and literacy.

A number of studies have stressed that in order for the work of assistants to be effective they need clearly defined job specifications, management and training. (Clayton, 1993; Fox, 1993 & 1998; Pothecary and McCarthy, 1996; Moyles 1997, Challen & Majors, 1997; Connell & Rennie, 1997; Lorenz, 1998 and Balshaw, 1999). Owing to the numbers of pupils in mainstream primary schools with special educational needs, the role in supporting these pupils is emphasised. Watkinson (1998/9) and Marr (2000) report that although some schools and Local Education Authorities have set up training and induction courses for assistants, there is no countrywide system of training and accreditation. Swann and Loxley (1998) also document the national and local policy regarding assistants as one of "unplanned drift and attempts at innovation through training" (p.157). Some schools have the types of induction, support and training systems recommended by Lorenz (1998) whilst in others the ways in which they are used is very ad hoc. The impact of the research project carried out by Smith (1999) at the University of Southampton which examined ways of providing a career ladder for classroom assistants for the Teacher Training Agency, and the current Open University research into classroom assistants in the primary schools' findings (Hancock, Marr and Swann) are still awaited.

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This raises a number of issues. Without knowing what assistants do to support language and literacy and how they do it, it will be difficult to design tailored training programmes to meet the needs of children, teachers and schools. The teacher, as manager of the classroom environment, needs to be aware of how assistants support pupils' learning in order to plan, monitor and evaluate their work. In undertaking this research I was aware of the lack of literature on what assistants actually do in schools and classroom to support children and teachers, a view endorsed by Swann & Loxley (1998):

> One of the most striking features of the work of classroom assistants is how little attention has been paid to it by researchers, practitioners and policy makers. (p.142)

Clipson-Boyles (1996) in her handbook for early years' assistants specifically targets language and literacy. She discusses the centrality of language and explores all the environments, inside and outside school, where language use and learning are likely to occur. She looks at how language develops children's thinking, assessment and recording procedures, the complexity of reading and the range of reading methods and resources children may meet, how writing skills develop and how to support spelling and handwriting. Although the book is intended for those who train assistants the range of practices to support language and literacy appear to put the assistant in the role of 'assistant teacher'.

Following the introduction of the national literacy and numeracy strategies, Fox & Halliwell (2000) in their guide set out the roles assistants may be asked to carry out to support reading, writing, spelling and numeracy for pupils with special educational needs. They suggest strategies and resources to aid learning and reinforce appropriate behaviour that assistants will find useful in managing groups of children during the literacy and numeracy hours.

This perception of the classroom assistant as a 'supplementary teacher' can have dangers as well as advantages. Hughes and Westlake (1997) in their research found that although assistants, who were acting as talk partners in early years classroom, saw themselves as "playing roles which would complement and extend rather than replicate those of the teachers" they did in fact adopt 'teacherly' styles of interaction with the children, believing that they were only doing their job properly when "talking, telling, commanding and evaluating." (p.91).

The change in role from 'domestic helper' to 'assistant teacher' has created for assistants the conflict of 'care and control' that Woods (1987) referred to in relation to the work of teachers. Assistants are often required to work with children who have language and literacy needs as well as emotional and behavioural difficulties. They are, therefore, faced by the same worries about the management of inappropriate behaviour, as those faced by teachers, but without the same authority. This issue, which has become of even greater concern to assistants who are required to manage quite large groups of children withdrawn from the classroom, will be taken up again in the discussion of the data in chapters 4 and 5.

The National Literacy Strategy has focused attention on the type of work that assistants may be called upon to do in raising standards to a greater extent than was apparent in the past. The delivery of the Additional Learning Support programme is heavily reliant on assistants and teachers working together to deliver planned support for children who are considered to be under-achieving. The modules include prescriptive, scripted lesson plans on phonics, spelling, reading and writing and state whether these should be 'taught' by the teacher or the assistant. This puts the assistant firmly in the role of 'assistant teacher'.

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Conclusion

The review of literature on the work of classroom assistants reveals the wide range of roles and responsibilities and the diverse backgrounds of the assistants. Whilst recognising the need for assistants to be trained to carry out the many teaching aspects of their roles, what is not apparent, and this was commented upon in the HMI (1992) review, is how schools can make best use of assistants' previous experience, including their family language and literacy practices.

The literature surveyed raises a number of issues concerning the roles of assistants. These concentrate, in the main, on the changing role from 'an extra pair of hands' – a role that is still needed if teachers are not to be overburdened with housekeeping and clerical duties (Swann & Loxley, 1998) – to that of 'assistant teacher' and the management and training needed to enable both teachers and assistants to fulfil these new roles. There is little reported research on how assistants support children in the acquisition and development of language and literacy. This suggests that the questions I am investigating fall into an under-researched area. In the aims I raised the issues of 'context' for language and literacy learning; the effect of assistants' family literacy histories and personal practices on the support they offer children; whether there were continuities and discontinuities across and within schools and key stages and the language and literacy policies of the school and any possible inconsistencies between these.

The questions to be addressed in relation to the above, i.e. the assistants' relationships with children and teachers; the language functions observed; how, or if, tasks are scaffolded; whether assistants conserve their own literacy practices; how their work relates to the policies of the school and any adjustments the assistants make across classes and schools and how, or whether, they use published 'packages' will be dealt with in chapters 4 & 5.

In drawing out themes from the literature, and setting out a theoretical framework, these questions remain appropriate. The effect of the National Literacy Strategy and Additional Learning Support materials and how these are used, and mediated by assistants for children, will also be considered. Although a wide range of culturally diverse texts are included in the National Literacy Strategy recommendations, it is not clear how the strategy expects to cater for the different but subtle ways of taking that form the language and literacy practices of home.

The National Literacy Strategy has had a significant affect on the ways both teachers and assistants support children in learning to be literate. The strategy has not been accepted wholeheartedly by all (Dombey, 1995, Furlong, 1998 and Meek 1998). However, if this is the only model demonstrated to assistants by teachers and used to draw up school language policies then opportunities for assistants to use their own intuitive practices and to build on the social and cultural language and literacy practices of the local community will be restricted.

CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY – RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA GATHERING TECHNIQUES

Introduction

In order to investigate the research questions set out in relation to the work of classroom assistants, I needed data concerning:

1. The ways and contexts in which classroom assistants supported children engaged in language and literacy tasks.
2. Information on how their own language and literacy histories and personal practices affected, or were affected by, the ways in which they worked in schools
3. The influence of school policies and practices on their work with children

I selected an ethnographic approach as described by Hammersley (1994), that is, data gathered from a range of 'real world' contexts, which is 'unstructured' in the sense that it did not involve setting up a detailed plan from the start; nor did it have fixed categories for interpreting what the assistants reported via the questionnaire or said and did during the semi-structured interviews and observations. It was focused on the work of a relatively small number of classroom assistants working in mainstream primary schools. I used grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) in order to generate hypothesis from the data collected. This method seemed appropriate in order to ensure that the data reflected conditions actually present at the time (internal validity) was typical of conditions present in other situations (external validity) and contributed to the generation of new concepts by comparing information obtained by different methods (reflexivity). As the data was collected I used a process known as progressive focusing in order to generate insights about the themes that were emerging. (E824 Study Guide). The data collected from the phase one of my research was used to generate a questionnaire and draw up semi-structured interview questions and an observation schedule for use in the second phase. The categories which emerged from data gathered during the second phase, together with information from the literature review, provided

the basis for the interviews, observations and collection of school policy documents during phase three, the final phase. I based my findings, which will be discussed in later chapters, on the information obtained.

PHASE ONE – PILOT STUDY

Initially I planned to collect data from at least three schools during the pilot study in order to find out to what extent the different environments affected the work of assistants. However, two problems, which I had not anticipated arose. One, the exodus of a number of heads and teachers due to a deadline for early retirement being imposed, and two, a change in my own personal circumstances. In order to accommodate these I negotiated access to one 4+ - 11+ urban primary school.

During the pilot study I collected data using observations of, and semi-structured interviews with, five assistants (then known as non-teaching assistants) about their work with children in school and their family literacy histories and practices. I interviewed the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (Senco) as she was responsible for the day-to-day deployment of assistants and I collected copies of school policy documents.

In carrying out my research I followed the ethnographic tradition of research, as developed by anthropologists and utilised in several fields, including education, in order to look into the language and literacy practices used by classroom assistants as they worked with children in school. (Heath, 1983, 1988, Maybin 1994, MacLure, 1994) I selected this approach because I needed to consider the 'real life' classroom context in which language and literacy learning was taking place, the degree to which the tasks children and assistants worked on together were structured by the framework provided by the teacher, or the teaching materials, and the educational, social and cultural environment of the classrooms. As Ball (1993) indicates, "we must expect that settings affect and influence social action." (p.38). I was aware that my presence was likely to have an impact upon the behaviour of the assistants, the children and the teachers. I hoped that my

role as researcher would not be seen as threatening as I was well known in the school in my professional role of providing support and advice to the school regarding pupils with Special Educational Needs.

The ethical issue of my status, as a representative of the Local Education Authority did not immediately occur to me, as I was genuinely interested in the work of the assistants. In addition, the head and Senco appeared not just agreeable but pleased that I had approached them in order to gather data for my research project. It was not until I had gathered a certain amount of data, which revealed tensions between certain teachers and the assistants, that I realised the sensitive nature of some of the issues, for instance, that an assistant felt undervalued when a particular teacher frequently overlooked the fact that she was timetabled to support a group during a particular lesson. I was faced with the dilemma of whether I ought to have brought any sensitive issues to the attention of the head or Senco. I decided that in order to maintain confidentiality it was better not to say anything. I was not aware of any compulsion being placed on either teachers or assistants, to allow me to work in their classrooms, as I had stressed the voluntary nature of being involved and assured everyone concerned that confidentiality would be maintained. However, my questions regarding the personal literacy practices of the assistants, especially as teachers were not being asked similar questions, could have been construed as prying. In order to overcome this I offered transcripts of the tape recordings to all participants so that any contentious material could be removed. No one took up the offer. As far as I am aware parents were not approached for permission for me to observe an assistant working with their children on the grounds that the focus of my research was on the assistant rather than the children. However, it is essential that the anonymity of the pupils, the teachers and the assistants be preserved. Explicit authorisation was obtained before collecting copies of school policy documents and assistants' job descriptions, although the material would have been in the public domain. I offered a written report of my findings to the head and Senco. However, both felt that the verbal feedback I had given them was sufficient.

My professional relationship with the school, which had developed over four or five years, provided both advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage was one of trust and respect, which had developed between the school management team and me. This offered me an insider, as well as outsider view of the school. As a member of the Local Education Authority support team I had a duty to represent my findings in relation to the school's work with pupils with special educational needs in a reliable and truthful manner, especially as funding would, to a limited extent, be based on my recommendations. Although it was important to be aware of the possibility of conflict of interests no problems occurred, as the criteria for extra money was understood by the school and vetted by a panel of four local education authority personnel. When acting as a 'researcher' in the school I recognised that my knowledge of the staff and school could mean that my interpretation of the work of assistants on language and literacy might be biased in the school's favour, although my research was not looking for a model of effective practice, but rather for a realistic view of what happened on the ground in relation to my research questions. I hoped any tentative findings from the pilot study would help me formulate questions for the next phases of the research project.

The concept of triangulation

In order to establish validity and strengthen reliability a procedure known as *triangulation* was adopted initially during the pilot study and then to cover the whole research project. In relation to my research I am defining triangulation as the gathering of data from three different sources in order to obtain information from different standpoints. I took the view expounded by Hopkins (1993) that, "Each point of the triangle stands in a unique epistemological position with respect to access to relevant data about a teaching situation" (p.153). The data gathered included:

- Audio taped recordings of semi-structured interviews with assistants.

- My observations and audio-taped recordings of assistants working with children
- The collection of the school's policies for English, Special Educational Needs and a copy of the assistants' job descriptions plus an interview with the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (Senco).

The data was analysed in order to find out:

1. The extent to which assistants' work supported children's acquisition of language and literacy was reflected in assistants' job descriptions; the language policies of the school; the activities teachers asked them to carry out; the records assistants kept on children's work and how these were monitored and evaluated and the effect of any in-service training provided.
2. Whether the influence of their own language histories and personal language practices were apparent from the way they mediated tasks, asked questions and built on children's background knowledge and knowledge of the local community.

Alongside the above data, and information from the literature review which formed the basis for my theoretical framework, I kept field notes in order to gather opportunistic data from a wider context. This enabled me to reflect on the core data from the pilot study in relation to the broader context of my work and professional experience, which might illuminate, or inform, my perceptions about the work of classroom assistants. Notes were taken in other schools as part of my role as Head of Special Needs Support Team, in meetings with other professionals and from members of the support team.

The data gathered from the pilot study provided valuable but only limited and context specific information. Schofield (1993) discusses the issue of generalizability and suggests that the term 'fittingness' may be a more workable and realistic way of "analysing the degrees to which the situation studied matches other situations in which one is interested." He goes on to suggest that the researcher consider, "*what is,* to *what may be,* and *to what*

could be." (p.99) My study was limited to the *'what is'* in one urban primary school about which I had a great deal of prior knowledge. However, information gathered through my field notes about the broader context, indicated that the school was typical of many urban primary schools with a mixed working and middle class, mainly white, population. In order to study the *what may be* and *what could be* the study needed to be expanded to visit schools with different practices, in relation to classroom assistants and their work in supporting language and literacy.

PHASES TWO AND THREE

Introduction

In order to build upon information gathered during the pilot study and obtain a broader overview of the work of classroom assistants in mainstream primary schools, I designed, trialled, reviewed and distributed a questionnaire. I hoped the mixture of quantitative and qualitative data gained from the questionnaire would provide additional as well as a different type of data. I sent the questionnaire to all 39 primary schools in the authority. In this way I was able to target a large number of assistants and obtain data which was analysed for emerging themes embracing a wider range of views than that obtained from one school. The brief checklist compiled from my observations on the range of tasks carried out by assistants and from field notes taken at conferences and training sessions also enabled some numerical data to be collected about the frequency of certain types of language and literacy related support. The confidential and anonymous nature of the questionnaire was stressed as this allowed assistants, if they wished, to express views they may have felt inhibited about in a face-to-face interview.

METHODOLOGY FOR THE MAIN STUDY - PHASE TWO AND PHASE THREE

Introduction

The main study covers the period from September 1998 to April 2000. In order to establish three layers of context I planned and carried out a questionnaire survey as this would provide, depending on the number of

returns, a quantity of data and give a broad overview of the work of assistants in the area. At the same time, and linked to my professional role as Literacy Consultant, I carried out brief observations and interviews in eight of the thirty-nine schools. The qualitative data collected, as a second layer, was useful to 'allow the assistants' voices' to speak regarding their role in supporting language and literacy and to indicate how their own beliefs and values – at a specific point in time – contributed to that role. The third contextual layer was provided by an in-depth study in three schools, involving observations, semi-structured interviews and the collection of policy documents. The three schools were chosen to represent a range of settings. Therefore, I obtained data from general as well as specific contexts, which could be related to literature on the work of classroom assistants. The analysis of the data allowed me to explore my research questions and draw out grounded themes, based on the concept grounded theory and progressive focusing, regarding the work of assistants in mainstream primary schools.

During the academic year 1998/9 the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy meant that teachers and classroom assistants faced a period of rapid change and considerable challenge. In order to ensure that my research remained focused during the early part of the autumn term 1998, I kept field notes documenting the types of activities undertaken by assistants in the fourteen schools identified as needing my support to implement the National Literacy Strategy. I also talked to assistants and teachers. The information obtained contributed to the design of the questionnaire, the formation of questions for the semi-structured interviews in eight schools and indicated the type of session it would be useful to observe in these schools with the consent of the heads, teachers and assistants.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was devised and trialled during the autumn term 1998. It was amended and distributed during the spring term 1999. Although the changed location of the research presented problems and disadvantages,

including negotiating access into unknown schools during a period of considerable challenge, I proceeded, with the help of my new colleagues in the Local Education Authority, to design and distribute the questionnaire. It was agreed at the outset that I would prepare a short report, once the data had been analysed, for my colleagues on the team and for distribution to the thirty-nine primary schools in the authority. In fact, a questionnaire was probably a more reliable and less threatening way of collecting data than in-depth interviews and observations would have been whilst school staffs were adjusting to the Literacy Hour. From visits to schools and in-service training sessions in connection with the National Literacy Strategy, it was clear that teachers were feeling insecure in their roles and finding the planning for the literacy hour time consuming, and in many cases stressful. Assistants felt similar pressures as my discussion of the interviews and observations in chapter 4 will show.

The information gathered during phase one and my review of the literature (see chapter 2) provided information, insights and ideas which enabled me to construct a theoretical framework for my own research. This information suggested that there was a great diversity of practice in the ways in which assistants were deployed and managed. I used this information in compiling the questionnaire. The first page consisted of a list asking assistants to tick boxes indicating the type of support they offered pupils and provided me with data that could be analysed numerically.

The next three questions asked assistants about the kinds of support they offered pupils in order to:

1. develop pupils' speaking and listening skills
2. develop pupils' reading, and
3. develop pupils' writing

I felt that responses to these questions would give me more specific information that could inform the design of the observation schedules and semi-structured interview questions. This would also allow me to gain an impression of the range of support offered by assistants in these three areas.

I could then check my observation and field notes from the eight schools that I was observing, in order to see if the same range applied in context specific situations. The following table sets out questions 4 -32 together with my justification for posing them. A copy of the questionnaire is included in *Appendix A*.

Table 3:1 – Questions 4 – 32

Question Nos.	*Question and Rationale*
4-10	These questions referred to liaison with teachers over planning, recording reporting and monitoring of work with pupils in order to address my research questions relating to the contexts in which assistants worked and how school policies and practices affect such work.
11 & 12	These questions related to the rewards and frustrations of working as an assistant in order to explore how assistants felt about their roles in a range of situations.
13	This question asked about the ways assistants thought their work could be made more productive or useful in order to gain insights into the contribution assistants felt they could make to the children, the teachers and the school.
14 & 15	These questions referred to training assistants had received or would like in order to assess how assistants were being prepared for their roles and their ideas on what they needed to carry these out.
16	This question asked about any contribution assistants made, or felt they could make to school policies to judge whether their views were taken into account when drawing up policies which affected them.
17-24	These questions asked for details about age, education, employment record and length of service as an assistant in order to obtain information about how, or if, qualifications and experience contributed to their work in school. I hypothesised that social, cultural, educational and work related backgrounds might influence assistants' values and beliefs about literacy.
25a-32	This final section asked about their own literacy histories and personal practices in order to begin to explore the effect of these socially and culturally based practices on their work in schools.

My colleagues in the authority had some reservations regarding the question about frustrations as it might have looked as though assistants were being invited to criticise the school or a particular teacher. However, I felt that in order to explore how assistants felt about their roles in a variety of situations this was an important question to ask, especially as the pilot study had revealed some tensions when an assistant felt undervalued.

I stressed the confidential and anonymous nature of the questionnaire. I received a total of 47 replies from assistants in 20 of the 49 schools, plus a joint response from six assistants in one school.

Analysis

In examining open ended questions on the questionnaire (Questions 1-12 and 25a - 32 *Appendix A*), the interview and observation data for analysis I looked for 'grounded' themes', (Nias, 1991, p.137) in order to provide insights into how assistants supported children's acquisition and development of language and literacy. The questionnaire also provided a degree of quantitative data regarding age, educational background, previous employment history, length of service as an assistant and previous voluntary or paid work in the schools, training in relation to their work in schools, types of contract and range of activities undertaken. Many categories in the above list, such as routes into employment as an assistant and the diversity of roles they played, confirm reports cited in chapter 2. (HMI 1992 and NUT 1998). These, together with issues this research has raised will be discussed in the findings.

PHASE TWO –INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS IN THE EIGHT SCHOOLS

Introduction

The observations and interviews that I carried out in the eight schools during autumn 1998 and spring 1999 were brief owing to my heavy workload and the fact that the questionnaire was the main focus of the study during phase two. They did, however, serve as pilots for the observation schedule and interview questions used in the more focused study during phase three.

Selection of eight schools in which to carry out observations and interviews: autumn 1998 – spring 1999

A main feature of my role as literacy consultant during this period was to support the fourteen schools that had been identified as needing intensive support in implementing the National Literacy Strategy because of low scores on the Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) at the end of KS1 or KS2. I elected to use eight of the fourteen schools in which to carry out brief

observations and interviews partly on the grounds of workload. It would have been impossible to balance the demands of the job and the research in a greater number of schools or to concentrate in any depth on only two or three schools. The six schools I chose not to use admitted high numbers of pupils with English as an additional language and although I worked closely with the ethnic minority team I did not have sufficient knowledge of the cultural and social aspects of supporting these children to make a reliable or valid analysis of the work classroom assistants did to support them. In order to be systematic in my collection of data I asked the same questions during the semi-structured interviews as those posed on the questionnaire. Because of the anonymous nature of the questionnaire, I do not know which, or whether, any of the assistants who answered the questionnaire were also involved in the semi-structured interviews. The observations, of necessity, were all carried out when assistants were working to support children during the literacy hour. In order to observe whether the same range of continuities and discontinuities applied as had been observed in the pilot school, I arranged to observe assistants working in both KS1 and KS2.

Table 3:2 – The eight schools in phase two of the study 1998/1999

Baker Primary School 5-11 years: school in special measures owing to failed Ofsted inspection	2 visits Autumn Term 1998 In depth observations and interviews with 2 assistants	Situated on the edge of town: an estate with a high proportion of home ownership
The Field Infants School Low KS1 Standard Assessment Task scores	2 visits Autumn Term 1998	Situated on the edge of town in an area classed as white working class
The Field Junior School Low KS2 Standard Assessment Task scores	2 visits Autumn Term 1998	Situated on the edge of town in an area classed as white working class
The Copse Primary School Low Standard Assessment Task scores	2 visits Spring term 1999	Town centre school with a multi-ethnic population
The Grove Primary School Low Standard Assessment Task scores KS1 & KS2	2 visits Spring Term 1999 One group interview with all assistants at their request	Situated on the edge of town on an estate with a high proportion of home ownership
Rainbow Primary School Identified as having serious weaknesses by Ofsted	2 visits Spring term 1999	Situated on the edge of town serving a large council estate
White Park Infants Low KS1 Standard Assessment Task scores	2 visits Spring Term 1999	Situated on the edge of town in a mainly white working class area
White Park Junior School Low KS2 Standard Assessment Task	2 visits Spring Term 1999	Situated on the edge of town in a mainly white working class area

One of the advantages of working in a new local authority, which I did not immediately recognise until I came to examine my own role in the research process, was that although I had the beliefs and values associated with my

own literacy history and personal practices, I had no pre-conceived ideas regarding the schools. Neither did I have any way of anticipating how the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy would affect the teachers and classroom assistants working in them. If I had continued to work in schools which I knew well, and where I was well known, my expectations as to how assistants and teachers were likely to behave, and their expectations of me, might have added a further layer of subjectivity.

The replies from the questionnaire, information from the eight schools and field notes taken at inservice training sessions and conferences were analysed during the summer term 1999, in order to draw up an observation schedule and refine the questions for the semi-structured interviews for phase three of the research which involved:

- Close study of assistants working in three schools, two 5 – 11 primary schools and one infant school, to include interviews with the head teacher and/or Senco, interviews with the assistants and an analysis of policy documents.
- Observation of the work of particular assistants in specific classrooms, covering both KS1 and KS2 (observation and taping)

PHASE THREE: INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS IN THE THREE CORE SCHOOLS – SEPTEMBER 1999 – APRIL 2000

Introduction

The schools selected for in-depth observations, semi-structured interviews with assistants and the head teacher and/or Senco were chosen because they represented, as far as was possible in such a small sample, a range of practices in the way assistants were deployed and managed. The schools reflected differing catchment areas as the information from the questionnaire and the literature survey indicated that assistants were likely to live close to the schools in which they worked. Assistants' own language and literacy practices might, therefore, reflect the practices of the local community and I wanted to analyse the ways in which they drew upon

community practices to support children's acquisition and development of language and literacy. In order to maintain consistency, the three schools selected were urban schools situated in close proximity to those used for the questionnaire survey. The schools and the assistants working in them were willing to be part of the research project. To some extent this means that the schools were 'self-selected' which could affect reliability and validity. However, none of the schools I approached, whether finally selected or not were unwilling to be part of the project.

The Interviews

Eleven assistants were interviewed in three schools. The head teachers agreed to arrange for assistants to be released for short sessions on each of my three visits. In reviewing the ways in which I carried out the interviews in the pilot study, I decided that rather than have one, rather lengthy interview with each assistant, I would put the questions into sections, and use about 10 to 15 minutes on each visit to cover a particular section. One of the problems I recognised when reviewing my work on the pilot study was that one lengthy interview did not offer me the opportunity to ask for clarification or development of any interesting, confusing or conflicting points. I also realised that short, less formal interviews, would be less threatening to the assistants. I also planned the shorter interviews on the basis of being systematic: it is not so easy in a ten or fifteen minute interview to be drawn away from the schedule. Shorter interviews also fitted more easily into assistants' busy schedules. I recognised that the interviews would be shaped, not only by the questions asked, but also by my responses to the answers, a factor which would not have influenced replies to the questionnaire. I found that responding to assistants' answers, and probing a bit further, encouraged them to talk about what they were doing.

The interview questions were drawn up as a result of experience gained from the pilot study and the analysis of responses to the questionnaire survey. I divided the interview schedule into three sections. A copy is included in *Appendix C.*

Set One focused on factual aspects of the assistant's work in school in order to get an overview, length of service, nature of contract, job description, year groups supported as well as asking the assistant to describe a typical week. Results from the questionnaire indicated that knowing the context in which the assistant worked was important in understanding aspects of planning and liaison.

Set Two looked for indications of liaison and partnership between teachers and assistants. Results from the questionnaire and pilot study suggested that the rewards and frustrations of the job were closely linked to whether assistants felt they were regarded as an integral part of the school staff.

Set Three asked about the assistants' literacy histories and personal practices in order to gain an impression of their values and beliefs in relation to literacy.

Observations

I negotiated with the head teacher and/or Senco to observe four assistants in the combined infant and junior primary schools and three in the infant school working on language related tasks both inside and outside the classroom. Table 5:3 Data Collection from the Three Core Schools is included in chapter 5. In each school I observed: an assistant working in class supporting a group during the literacy hour, assistants supporting withdrawal groups which was part of their normal routine, and, in KS2 an assistant using the National Literacy Strategy Additional Learning Support materials with a group of pupils who attained a level 2C or below in the Key Stage Two Standard Assessment Tests (SATs). These activities were selected to reflect normal practice in the schools. I agreed with the assistant in advance that she would explain to the children that I was interested in her work and wanted to find out more about what she did. I positioned myself so that I could see and hear what was happening but on the edge of the group. After I had been introduced I avoided eye contact with the children

and did not comment on the proceedings. Observations were recorded and the recordings supported by notes regarding the attitude of the children, the pace of the session, and any apparent indications as to the effect of my presence, as both observer and participant, had on the children and the assistant. I drew up a brief observation form so that I could note down details of the context, activity and any comments or queries. *(Appendix C)*

Audio-taping

An unobserved taped session of an assistant from each school working with a child/children was made as I felt it was important to have data, which could not have been affected by my presence. The assistant, in collaboration with the teacher, chose which session to tape. In view of the changes due to the National Literacy Strategy and Additional Learning Support materials it was felt that the choice should be left open as this might more accurately reflect how the assistant supported a particular language and literacy activity. A copy of the transcript was passed to the assistant who was invited to comment if she wished. Only one assistant, who made three tape recordings of herself working with different age groups on a science activity, made any comments and her reflections on each activity will be discussed in chapter five when looking at data analysis.

School policy documents

The results from the questionnaire indicated that there was great diversity of practice regarding assistants' awareness of, and access to, policy documents such as the Special Educational Needs and Language policies. Assistants were asked if they had access to school policy documents, and, if so, how these were implemented in relation to their roles. The policy documents were also analysed and compared with assistants' responses and with my own observations of their practice. I also obtained, when available, a copy of the assistants' job descriptions in order to compare the roles and responsibilities described with those the assistants undertook in practice. The following table summarises the type of data and shows the time scale over which it was collected:

Table 3:3 – Data collection time scale: phases one - three

Time Span	*Data Sources*
Academic year 1997/8 Autumn & spring terms Phase one – first LEA	Pilot study, observations interviews and collection of school documents in one urban primary school
Academic year 1998/9 Autumn term Phase two – second LEA	School visits, brief observations and interviews in 8 schools. Initial design of questionnaire. Field notes from inservice training sessions and conferences
Academic year 1998/9 Spring term Phase two – second LEA	Piloting and revision of questionnaire. Circulation to all 39 mainstream primary schools. Observations in 8 schools continued. Field notes from inservice training sessions, school visits and conferences
Academic year 1998/9 Summer Term Phase two/three –second & third LEAs *The second and third LEAs were all part of the same county prior to the establishment of Unitary Authorities*	Analysis of data from questionnaire Summary Report to all 39 schools Preparation of observation schedules and semi-structured interview questions based on information from questionnaire and schools visits. Field notes from inservice training sessions and conferences
Academic year 1999 –2000 Autumn & spring terms Phase three – third LEA	Selection of three schools from which to gather core data: one KS1 and two KS2. Observations, interviews, audio-tapes and collection of school documents

Conclusion

In considering the various research strategies, which can best be employed in a study of this kind, it becomes clear that absolute objectivity, either procedural or ontological, is unattainable. (Eisner, 1993, Phillips, 1993). The aim of this study is to scrutinise carefully the data gathered, the means by which it has been gathered, and bias on behalf of myself as researcher. In analysing the data it will be important to allow for the effect my presence, or the fact that a tape recording was being prepared for me, might have had on the ways in which assistants supported children. Moyles (1997) in her report indicated that "assistants focus heavily on the outcomes of children's activities". (p.39) I was concerned that an assistant, anxious to demonstrate what children can accomplish, might stress product over process even more than usual, especially when watched by a researcher who visits the school in an advisory capacity.

It is hoped that by making explicit the methodology using three contextual layers to inform each other and the way the methodology has been adapted to meet the needs of this piece of research, i.e. the questionnaire as a general survey, the gathering of core data through interviews, observations and scrutiny of school documents, reliability and validity will be strengthened. By choosing a methodology in order to draw out 'grounded' themes, showing what assistants do as well as getting their accounts of what they do, it will be possible for other researchers to evaluate my findings, and if they wish, to do similar work.

My research documented the work of classroom assistants during a time of considerable change and upheaval in schools and this factor had made sensitivity to context even more important than it would have been during a period of relative stability.

Chapter 4 reports on the questionnaire survey and brief observations and interviews in the eight schools and chapter 5 reports on the interviews, observations and collection of school documents in the three core schools.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS – PHASE ONE AND PHASE TWO

Introduction

I explained in chapter 3 why the four main sources of data: questionnaire, interviews, observations and collection of school policy documents had been selected on methodological grounds. Table 3:3 on page 65 indicates the time span over which the different types of data were collected.

To summarise, my data included:

Phase One

- Interviews with, and observations of, 5 assistants in the pilot school. The data obtained was used to inform the methodology, the design of the questionnaire survey, interview and observation schedules for the main study, which is the subject of this report.

Phase Two

- Questionnaire responses from 47 assistants in 39 schools: 38 of the replies came from 20/39 schools (*See Appendix A for a copy of the Questionnaire)*
- Interview and observation data from 8 schools as set out in the Table 3:2 on page 60.
- Field notes from meetings, in-service training sessions and conferences.

Phase Three

- Interviews with, and observations of, 4 assistants in the two 5 - 11primary schools and 3 assistants in the 5 –7 infant school
- 8 unobserved audio-taped recordings of assistants from the 3 core schools
- Policy documents from the 3 core schools.

In this chapter I shall focus mainly on the questionnaire survey, and look briefly at data from the observations and interviews in the eight schools and the field notes taken at conferences, meetings and in-service training sessions. Data collected from the 3 core schools will be analysed and discussed in chapter 5.

SURVEY OF CLASSROOM ASSISTANTS: RESULTS FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE CIRCULATED TO 39 SCHOOLS AND MY OBSERVATIONS AND INTERVIEWS IN EIGHT SCHOOLS

In order to establish the context in which classroom assistants worked some general questions were asked relating to age, educational background, previous employment, length of service in schools, contracts of employment and reasons for working as classroom assistants, see chapter three. Replies from both the questionnaire and interviews revealed that:

Age range: The majority of assistants were between 36 and 55 years

Education: Formal qualifications held by assistants ranged from none to degree level: 26/47 assistants held 'O'/CSE/GCSE and/or commercial qualifications. Qualifications under other included nursing, catering, librarianship, nursery nurses and playgroup leaders. Four assistants, all working in KS1, had completed the Specialist Teacher Assistant (STA) course with the Open University (OU). Younger assistants tended to be better qualified than older assistants – this may reflect the changing social and cultural expectations of women.

Length of Service This ranged from under a year to over 18 years with the majority serving between 1 and 6 years.

Hours per week There was an enormous variation in the number of hours per week. One assistant was employed for 2 hours and others for between 10 and 32 hours per week. In addition to working in the classrooms several assistants continued to work as lunchtime supervisors.

Types of Contract Assistants were employed under a range of permanent, temporary and mixed full and part-time contracts.

Previous Employment The range of work done by classroom assistants prior to taking up their posts in schools varied enormously from lunchtime supervisor – a route reported by HMI (1992) to teacher.

Table 4:1 sets out the data related to qualifications and previous employment obtained from the questionnaire. A similar pattern emerged from interviews in the eight schools.

Table 4:1 – Question nos. 23 & 24
Educational qualifications and previous work experience

Qualifications	*No. of assistants*	*Previous Work Experience*
None	5	Shop Assistants
"	2	Office Work
"	3	Lunch Time Supervisors
'O' level/CSE/GCSE	13	Clerical/Secretarial
"	1	Nursing
"	1	Catering
"	3	Nursery Nurses
"	1	Care Assistant
"	1	Shop Assistant
Degrees	3	Teachers
"	1	Scientific Officer
"	1	Art Gallery/Museum Curator
"	1	A number of part-time jobs

The information given above indicates the range and diversity of women employed as classroom assistants in terms of their age, educational background, previous employment and length and terms of service as an assistant. Lee & Mawson (1998) reported a similar pattern.

Question no. 19 - Reasons for working as classroom assistants

All the assistants completing the questionnaire and those interviewed were married women with children. They had chosen posts in schools because of a desire to work with children and the family friendly hours. One assistant took the post as a route into teaching, a career aspiration reported by NUT (1998). Many assistants had worked as volunteer helpers or lunchtime supervisors in the schools or had been involved with the local playgroup. As Lee and Mawson (1998) reported, having volunteer helpers working in schools gives the head the opportunity to assess a candidate's suitability to work as an assistant and to judge their commitment.

Comment

The tabulated data only provided limited information, which needed comment and interpretation through cross-referencing between categories. Initially I examined the data to see if there was any significant difference between the age groups in terms of their own language practice, personal histories and level of formal qualifications. I had hypothesised that the cultural, social and educational contexts experienced by the different age

groups of assistants might have influenced their values and beliefs in relation to literacy. However, as the majority of assistants fell into the 36-55 year age group, and this is consistent whether data is gathered through questionnaire or interview, this did not appear to be a useful line to pursue, apart from noting that the level and variety of qualifications and previous employment from this small sample is fairly mixed across all the age groups.

The results of the questionnaire did not suggest any direct link between qualifications, previous work experience, and the roles assistants undertook in schools. This seems to confirm the HMI (1992) report that schools did not necessarily use the skills and abilities that assistants possessed most effectively. The only exception was for assistants with nursing qualifications whose duties included that of first aid.

The majority of assistants in my research, similar to those reported in the NUT (1998) survey, were employed part-time. Results from the questionnaire and interviews showed that hours of employment for assistants on mixed contracts varied significantly depending on funding for children with Special Educational Needs. Interviews with heads and Sencos indicated that they found the ability to increase or decrease assistants' hours an efficient way of balancing funding when deploying assistants. Short-term contracts for 5 hours per week have increased in the authority where I carried out phase three of my research since the introduction of Additional Learning Support materials. These materials will be discussed in chapter 5.

Addressing the aims of the research project

In order to address the aims my research questions, assistants were asked, both during the semi-structured interviews and when completing the questionnaire, to answer questions which related to three broad areas:

1. The ways in which school policies and practices affected assistants' work.

2. The support assistants offered children engaged in language and literacy tasks. Tables 4:8, 4:9 and 4:10 set out the type of support assistants reported giving.
3. The language and literacy histories and personal practices of the assistants.

From the data collected two related areas emerged both of which had an impact on the curriculum support assistants afforded pupils. Firstly, the changing context in which teachers and assistants worked and secondly, the deployment of classroom assistants was closely linked to the management styles and ethos of the schools. I will discuss these in relation to my research questions as listed above beginning with the questionnaire responses and then commenting upon the extent to which the observations and interviews in eight schools corroborated the written responses. The eight schools, four 5 – 11 primary, two 5 – 7 infant and two 8 – 11 junior schools had all been identified as needing 'intensive support' from me in my professional role as Literacy Consultant in the authority, due to low scores on the Statutory Assessment Tests (SATs) at the end of KS1 or KS2. These schools were *not, therefore, representative of all the primary schools in the authority.* They were selected, as I explained in chapter 3, because I visited them regularly as part of my professional role and the pupils were not drawn, in the main, from the ethnic population whose family literacy histories and personal practices might have been unfamiliar to me. I shall turn first to the changing educational context as this had a significant impact on my work.

SUPPORTING THE ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY: THE CHANGING CONTEXT IN MAINSTREAM ENGLISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

The pilot study carried out during phase one of the research project and was completed prior to the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy. The tentative findings of this study, which was carried out in one urban primary school, had to be reviewed in light of the changes to working patterns for classroom assistants in order to ask appropriate questions and arrange to observe representative sessions of assistants working with children. Changes

in working practices for classroom assistants, as outlined in chapter two, are nothing new. However, the introduction of a national strategy for the teaching of language and literacy, with the stress on the teaching role assistants were to play in working with pupils, had a significant impact on both teachers and assistants. The introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy in 1999 confirmed, once again, the 'teaching' aspect of the assistants' roles. References under 'Teaching Reforms' (DfEE 2000) to 'teaching assistants' rather than 'classroom assistants' highlights the perceived change in role.

The National Literacy Strategy

The observations and interviews in schools, carried out during the same period that the questionnaire was being devised, trialled and circulated needed to take account of the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy. Several assistants interviewed during this period and a large number who attended one of the four inservice training sessions for assistants in connection with the literacy strategy towards the end of the spring term 1999 raised two particular areas of concern. One, the assistants' need for training in order to cope with 'teaching' groups of children and two, the need for a much higher level of liaison regarding the texts they were being expected to use with children and the unfamiliar tasks that assistants were being expected to help children accomplish. These concerns continued to be raised by assistants when the Additional Learning Support materials were introduced. These concerns highlighted the need for assistants' learning to be 'scaffolded' before they could be expected to support children's learning. A copy of the notes taken during the interview with six assistants in Copse End in March 1999 is included in *Appendix D*, as this illustrates the range of issues raised by assistants during phase two in a number of schools.

Initial National Literacy Strategy training for head teachers and the schools' literacy co-ordinators took place in England during summer term 1998. Schools were expected to draw up a programme of training for staff using the five modules in the Literacy Training Pack (DfEE 1998). Training for

classroom assistants across schools in order to meet the demands on them was variable. In some schools, the practice alluded to in the HMI (1992) report of learning 'on the job' applied. In other schools, great pains were taken to include assistants in all the dedicated training sessions, to provide them with copies of the National Literacy Strategy modules and to plan to up-date job descriptions. The infant school awarded Investor in People status included literacy strategy training for all assistants in its Literacy Action Plan. The school also provided each assistant with the weekly literacy hour plan, in advance, showing their role in supporting a particular group. The weekly literacy hour plan was displayed on the wall in some other schools' classrooms but the assistants I spoke to did not seem to have been asked to consult them, although some did.

Local Education Authority training for classroom assistants during this phase of the research did not take place until towards the end of the spring term 1999. As indicated in the previous chapter until this time the authority had no accurate record of the number of assistants employed in the authority's primary schools. Concerns raised by assistants during these training sessions reflected those expressed during interviews throughout the research project: managing groups of children; supervising the class whilst the teacher worked with one group; lack of communication about the tasks they were expected to support and lack of involvement in planning. The interview with the assistants in Copse End (see *Appendix D*) corroborates much of the information provided by the questionnaire. It also shows that assistants are concerned about children's welfare and social development as well as their academic progress. The need to scaffold young children's coping strategies in order to become part of the school environment was an element discussed in chapter 2. (Pollard & Filer, 1996). However, when assistants were present for the whole hour they reported enjoying the sessions. They felt that, especially in the early stages, it was valuable for them to listen to the teacher's input as this ensured that they were aware of the teaching and learning objectives that they were expected to reinforce during the 20-minute group/independent session. I will give examples of

and discuss in more detail my observations of assistants supporting groups of children during these sessions later in this chapter.

During 1998/99 the eight schools all deployed assistants to support group work during the literacy hour. In some cases assistants were in the room for the whole hour, whereas in others they rotated round different classes to ensure that there was some support for group work throughout the school. A number of factors influenced deployment, including whether the assistant was employed to support a statemented pupil and the number of assistants, or volunteer helpers, available. In KS1, and in some KS2 classes, the assistant would often be asked to carry out other tasks such as setting out the equipment for an art lesson or mounting children's work for display whilst listening to the teacher's input on the text and word level work. The ways in which assistants were deployed varied not only across schools but also across classes within the same school. The issue of being usefully employed whilst listening to the teacher's input was a concern raised by the assistants in Copse End. Differences were particularly noticeable between KS1 and KS2. In some schools volunteer helpers were later recruited to work as assistants in order to deliver the Additional Learning Support sessions.

Classroom assistants were not the only ones concerned about planning and the management of pupils during the shared/independent element of the literacy hour. Training for all five modules of the literacy strategy continued throughout the autumn and spring terms. Two teachers from each school in the intensive cluster – the group of primary schools in the authority with the lowest scores on the Standard Assessment Tasks at the end of KS1 and KS2 from which the eight schools were drawn - had received training on all 5 modules in September 1998. However these teachers still had to disseminate the information to the rest of the staff. During my visits to schools and during the training sessions I delivered, heads and teachers expressed concern about the planning burden associated with the National Literacy Strategy. In order to address this problem several schools purchased a

published scheme known as the LCP Literacy Resource Files (LCP 1998). *(See Appendix E)* This scheme provides in-depth planning, week by week, for each year group, including text excerpts, a script to accompany each part of the lesson and a range of differentiated activities, based on the text, word and sentence level objectives for five groups of pupils each day. These files were compiled to cover all the genres and objectives demanded by the National Literacy Strategy 'Framework for Teaching'. The county previously employed one of the authors, whose advice was valued, so the files did, therefore, enjoy some validity in schools. However, several teachers and literacy consultants, expressed reservations about using excerpts from stories and poems, not as a 'taster' to entice the reader but as discrete passages to be 'analysed'. What do texts teach, if we don't read the whole text? (Meek, 1991: Tucker, 1993). As Lessing (1998) states,

> It is a wide experience that children need, and this means that books, literature, libraries, should be seen as treasure-houses of opportunity and pleasure, full of surprises and paths leading to whole worlds of delight, and never a sort of agenda, or requirement of the *adult world.* (my italics). (p.49)

Cassidy (TES, 15.09.00) reports that pupils joining secondary school have found their English lessons more enjoyable than those attended during the last year of primary school because they read 'whole books'. I will discuss the use of particular excerpts in relation to the support offered by individual assistants later in this chapter.

It is against this background that classroom assistants as well as teachers were working during phase two of the research project. As the National Literacy Strategy settled down and school staffs became used to the routine of the literacy hour and familiar with the Framework for Teaching, the anxieties lessened.

Responses from the questionnaire, observations and interviews in the eight schools indicated that the policies and practices of the different schools played a significant role in the way assistants were deployed. For instance, there was a strong team spirit in both the Field Infant and Junior schools who also worked in close partnership with each other. This was also the case in White Park Infants but was not so apparent in other schools.
The questionnaire (question numbers 4 - 10) asked for information about the level of liaison between teachers and assistants, the extent to which assistants were involved in planning and the rewards and frustrations of working as an assistant. It was felt that these questions would explore the similarities and differences in relationships within and across schools.

Managing the work of the classroom assistant

In order to tease out the policies and practices, whether implicit or explicit, with regard to the work of assistants on both the questionnaire and during interviews I asked assistants questions about the ways in which they were used in schools. Observations in the pilot study school, and the schools visited during the questionnaire phase, indicated that variations exist in the ways schools and individual teachers within schools manage the work of assistants. Moyles (1997) noted the lack of assistants' involvement in planning and that, even when there was some joint planning, it amounted to little more than "teachers sharing topic plans...and asking the assistants to think about activities for the children". (p.8). Prior to the introduction of the literacy hour some assistants reported turning up in class at the appointed time to discover that the teacher had completely overlooked the fact that they were due to be there. Although this was rarely the case following the introduction of the literacy hour – it did not mean that the assistant was always aware in advance of what she would be required to do as the following example of an observation in Baker school shows.

Observation of Mrs. G. working in a Y2 classroom

MRS. G., an assistant of long standing, was observed working with a group of five children – the least able in the Y2 class. As Mrs. G. walked back to the classroom with me after the morning coffee break she was told what she would be doing and which group she would be supporting. The task for the children was to turn a narrative into a play script, as set out in the LCP files. These young children had not yet adjusted to working in this way. The three unsupervised groups were very noisy. Each child in Mrs. G's group had different and competing needs, and each child had his/her own agenda. James wanted to write; Gareth wanted a worksheet; Christina and Jodie argued and Thomas wanted to read, 'Gargling with Jelly', which he found much more interesting than the task in hand. In the past Mrs. G. would have withdrawn one or two children to work on specific targets on their Individual Education Plans. There is no space in the school to withdraw five children – a restraint apparent in other schools during the course of my research. In the end, with time running out, Mrs. G. completes the list of characters and props for the play and the children join the others on the carpet for a noisy plenary. This example of an assistant feeling under pressure to 'get work done', is not uncommon. (Lorenz, 1998). Mrs. G. explained after the lesson that she felt happiest when helping children complete worksheets – a factor perhaps unconsciously recognised by the children who wanted to do writing or sheets! Mrs. G. recognised the need for task differentiation but did not necessarily have the skills and knowledge to provide each child with the scaffolding that he or she needed, especially at such short notice. Moyles (1997) reported similar findings before the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy.

In general, when observing classroom assistants working in KS1, the liaison between teacher and assistant was more frequent and much more detailed than in KS2. This observation was the exception and perhaps indicated the pressure the teacher and the children were feeling as they adjusted to a new way of working.

The following table summarises the range and diversity of information made available to assistants.

Table 4:2 – Questions 4 – 6: The information made available and the information assistants suggested they would find useful

Information made available	Information assistants would find useful
Given a general idea of the needs/problems: e.g. knows the pupils have a low reading age and difficulty writing.	Information about the whole child, home background, current home problems, behaviour difficulties.
A copy of the child's statement to read	Why pupils have been given support.
A copy of the IEP	Greater involvement in IEPs
Information from outside agencies such as speech therapists, advisory teachers, educational psychologists	*Liaison regarding pupils with speech & language, hearing and visual impairments is generally good.*
The files are available for reference.	How to interpret the information in reports
Information from the previous school	Previous school records and reports
The aims and objectives for each group well before the session	What is going to be covered in the lesson
Discussion with the teacher	
The ability group I will work with this lesson	
Flashcards for the week.	
The amount of help I should expect to give the children *	

- *Assistants were often concerned about the amount of help they should give a child and 'how to bring a child on'.*

Moyles (1997) indicated that assistants in primary schools often focused on product rather than process. Responses to the questionnaire and answers to the semi-structured interviews indicate that assistants are aware that learning is much more than the product but need help in knowing how best to scaffold support for pupils.

More than half the assistants who completed the questionnaire felt that they were not offered sufficient information about the pupils and their needs. As one assistant wrote, "I feel this lack of information is one of the most frustrating things about the job." However, lack of information is clearly not a problem in some classes, as one KS1 assistant wrote:

> *I work with a wonderful teacher who makes my job enjoyable. We liaise a great deal with regard to pupils' needs. (sic)*

The assistant works with a particularly gifted reception class teacher and has built up a warm and professional relationship over several years. Connell & Rennie (1997) highlighted the management issues in 'Classroom assistants:

Classroom teams' and emphasised the need to train teachers in using the skills of support staff.

Question 6 asked assistants to report on what information they were given on how the activities they undertook supported children's learning. The answers to this question very much reflected the responses to the previous one. Some assistants were involved in formal planning meetings related to pupils with special educational needs, especially where an outside agency was involved. Speech therapists would review progress with the assistant and discuss the next stage in the programme. Two assistants reported providing information for the annual reviews of pupils with a statement of special educational need. Several assistants stated that they were given copies of the week's lesson plans relating to the literacy hour, which showed the individual and group targets and any intended outcomes. Seven assistants reported keeping liaison books or record sheets. One assistant reported, *"Twenty minutes is set aside each day to discuss the objectives and advice is always available." (sic)* This is the only incident of dedicated, daily planning time recorded in answers to the questionnaire survey. However, some assistants did report speaking to the teacher at the beginning of the day. Observations suggest that this may amount to a few snatched minutes while the children are coming into class. One assistant wrote, *"There's never enough time for sufficient explanation from the teacher."* and another, *"It depends on which teacher I'm working with."(sic).*

There is some indication that where there is a well-established partnership between the assistant and teacher, formal liaison is not felt to be necessary. Remarks such as, *"It's obvious"* and *"self-evident"* were recorded. One assistant expanded by writing, *"Over time each activity has been explained to me, e.g. what games are intended to convey, etc."* (sic) An interview with, and observation of Mrs. V.S. working on a language game with a group of pupils, confirmed that an experienced assistant, and especially one who has undertaken a high level accredited training course, is aware of how the activities are intended to support learning. Notes from my field diary

after talking to assistants on the Specialist Teacher Assistant course, however, indicate that even experienced assistants feel 'at a loss' when they don't get the support from their teacher mentor. One assistant stated, *"I need to explore how what I am learning can be used."* (sic)

Most of the liaison between teacher and assistant reported was informal. One assistant wrote, *"I'm not given any information but usually have a conversation before a lesson concerning content."* An example of this kind of liaison was that reported on p.77 where an assistant was helping a group of Y2 children to turn a story into a playscript.

Questions 7 & 8: How/where do you record observations of what pupils can do?

On reading the responses to this question I realised that, in order to obtain the information I required, I should also have asked for details of what, why and when assistants recorded observations of their work with pupils. Therefore, I rephrased the question for the interviews with the assistants during phase three of the research. Twenty-two assistants reported keeping some type of written record.

TABLE 4:3 – Question No. 7: Written records kept by assistants

Types of Written Record	No.
Notes in children's personal folders	2
Pupils' Records of Achievement	3
Reading records and spelling lists	2
National Literacy Strategy Word Lists	1
Notebooks, comments on worksheets	2
Home school liaison books	1
Short reports for annual reviews of statemented pupils	2
Own record book	1
Record sheet associated with phonic book	4
Observations to check progress and, with the teacher's permission we go over previous work or go on to something more difficult	1
Comment on how difficult/easy the child found the task and length of time to complete	1
Individual reading sheets: amount read, problems, progress and breakthroughs	1
Information Communication Technology – on record sheets I (the assistant) helped to design	1

Two assistants reported discussions with teacher, speech therapist and other assistants as a way of reviewing progress. One assistant, who wrote very little also stated *"Sometimes I am asked to write about the sort of help I've*

given on the child's work. I do not do this consistently and probably should."(sic)

The KS1 'Investor in People' school returned a 'joint' response that stated:

> All assistants have their own reading record books. They record titles and comments about reading on a daily basis. Assistants mark work throughout the week and offer rewards such as Smiley Faces for good, individual work or working well within their group. Every Friday thought is given to the programme for the following week. (sic)

The range of answers suggests that policies regarding record keeping vary widely. A similar pattern emerged when interviewing assistants in the eight schools. In most KS1 classes a record of the reading scheme books the child had read was kept. Often this was in the form of a bookmark, often made from old greetings cards, on which the title of the books, the pages read and the date were written. This 'record' would often go home with the child and parents would record any pages read at home. These bookmarks did not give any detail about the child's reading strategies. There was no mention of assessment strategies such as miscue analysis (Goodman, 1988) being used by assistants in order to help them 'bring a child on'. In KS2 such records were rare except for children experiencing difficulty who would often read to an assistant. In order to accommodate the demands of the National Literacy Strategy, the practice of hearing individual children read on a regular basis ceased in many schools. Several assistants expressed concern about this and one KS1 assistant stated, "You can't rely on parents to hear their children read and I think they need to have that special time." Remarks like this suggest that this assistant's own expectations and family literacy practices valued education and supported the work set by the school.

The next question asked about how the assistants' observations/records were used.

TABLE 4:4 – Question 9: Assistants' responses to the questionnaire regarding the effect of their observations on future work with children

Level of work set	Grouping	Reflection
Setting more difficult work	Showed which children worked well together	Reflection upon own understanding to see what extra help can be given
Indicates how far to take the activity	Grouping according to progress	Showed which children worked well with an assistant
Extra help for a child who has not kept up with the group		Adopting different strategies to address problems or provide additional activities
Raises awareness of children's strengths and weaknesses		
Continual assessment to meet particular needs, a simpler or more in depth approach may be needed or to re-visit to some aspects of the work		
Revising work until thoroughly understood		

There were fewer written responses to this question. Some replies indicated that, in addition to the academic and curricula needs of children, assistants influenced the 'social' composition of a group. This factor will be discussed later when considering the observations and interviews in chapter 5, especially in relation to Additional Learning Support group dynamics. One KS1 assistant wrote, *"Everything I say to my teacher is taken into account, and, if need be, we sit and discuss things."* A KS2 assistant wrote, *"I have no idea."* In some classrooms the 'partnership' approach to supporting children's learning seems firmly embedded in the ethos of the school. In others, the role of 'an extra pair of hands' (Moyles, 1997) seems more prevalent – reflecting perhaps, assistants' historical status as discussed in chapter 2.

Some of the questions about joint planning were answered in response to previous questions. The following table sets out the replies:

TABLE 4:5 – Question 10: Assistants and teachers planning together

Formal	Informal
Weekly meetings with the class teacher	Occasional brief 2/3 minutes at the beginning of the morning session
Meetings with teachers/other assistants on a regular basis plus discussing the morning's work every day, highlighting problems or seeking advice on how to deal with a situation	Very little. Some teachers give me a few day's notice of what they want me to do in a certain lesson but usually I am just told on arrival for a particular session
My teacher often asks my opinion on future work. I will involve myself in preparing, photocopying, collecting resources, etc for short and long term (KS1)	I am usually told of short-term plans, e.g. topics in science, but there is very little time given to planning.
Discussion meetings	Verbal before the lesson.
	A few minutes after the morning's lessons to discuss topics covered.

One assistant wrote, *"This is very difficult as I work with as many as 10 teachers each week." (sic)* A concern expressed in the NUT (1998) report, which refers to the unsatisfactory nature of fragmented support, with "bits and pieces of classroom assistant time allocated across the school." (p.14)

Liaison over planning, information about children's needs, feedback on the work children have done and opportunities to reflect on progress and concerns may be formal, informal or a combination of both. The informal exchange of information is more likely when assistants and teachers share the same staff room and coffee breaks, which was by no means always the case.

Replies to questions 4 - 10 offered some insights into the roles classroom assistants played in supporting pupils and teachers. Assistants working in KS1 were much more likely to be involved in planning, recording, reporting and reviewing children's work with teachers than those working in KS2. This was confirmed by the observations and interviews with assistants carried out during phase two. One assistant showed me her file detailing all the work she did with children. All the assistants in the school had similar files and, in addition to the weekly review, time was set aside at the end of each term to review progress and set new targets for each pupil with a statement of special educational needs.

The next question looked at the rewards and frustrations of the job. As reported in chapter 3 when revising the questionnaire with my Local Education Authority colleagues they were uncertain if questions about frustrations should be posed. However, I decided that, as I wanted to look at the implicit policies about way assistants were used in schools, a question about their concerns was essential.

Table 4:6 – Questions 11 & 12: Rewards and frustrations of the job

Rewarding Aspects	Frustrating Aspects
Child focused	***Child focused***
Pleasure in learning Children trusting you Great fun working with children Seeing children's behaviour improve Children's appreciation of help Children becoming independent	Occasionally a child's unwillingness to learn When children are disrupted by others Lazy children Lack of resources/reading materials at the right level Not having enough time
Partnership	***Partnership***
Good relationships between pupils and staff Working in a winning team The team spirit and atmosphere of the school	Lack of information/consultation/liaison Not being used to my full potential Teachers who do not know how to use assistants – do not plan for them in lessons Inconsistencies in managing behaviour by different teachers meaning that assistant have to adjust to different expectations Lack of communication throughout the school Lack of feedback on my work Insufficient liaison time Lack of training for assistants

In addition two assistants mentioned concerns about the literacy hour – still in its early stages:

- The constraints of the Literacy Hour – individuals can't be removed for extra help *(This may have been the school's interpretation of the guidelines – there were ways of meeting individual needs – my italics)*
- The structure of the Literacy Hour – the first half is too long for children with difficulties and the pace is too fast. *(The observation reported on p.77 also indicates that without thought being given to the task an assistant is expected to support, the children gain little and may become disenchanted).*

One assistant mentioned the frustration of badly behaved children and that she had devised her own discipline for these children. Woods (1987) refers to issues of care and control faced by teachers and my research suggests that

this can be an even greater problem for assistants. Children have been overheard saying things like, "*You're not a teacher – you can't tell me what to do*". Maybe that is why one assistant felt she had to devise her own behaviour management techniques, drawing, perhaps, on strategies she had found to be effective with her own children.

The rewarding aspects of work as an assistant look small in comparison to the frustrations. However, nearly all the assistants mention the same kinds of things in relation to rewards. The most frequently mentioned was their enjoyment of working with children and seeing children progress – not so different from that of teachers perhaps. Assistants who were interviewed at the time offered similar statements. The rewards, therefore, are similar across schools, but the frustrations may be peculiar to an institution or a few institutions and almost invariably relate to issues of management and the ethos of the school. The management and deployment of assistants will be discussed further in chapter 5.

Question No. 12: Ways in which assistants felt their work could be made more productive or useful.

Thirteen assistants did not answer this question, feeling perhaps that it had already been covered in the previous section. Others made the following suggestions.

TABLE 4: 7 – Question 12: The ways in which assistants felt their work could be made more useful or productive

Communication Issues	*Supporting Learning*	*Other*
Being involved in planning and better planning on behalf of teachers so they know how to use assistants	Knowing what the task is trying to accomplish	Consistent policies and practices for behaviour management
Better communication between staff	More games to stimulate literacy	Not being restricted by national initiatives
Recording more information on the development/progression of SEN pupils within the literacy/numeracy hours*(Some schools introduced this before the general start date)*	Working with groups who need 'a bit of explanation' to allow them to make progress rather than the children who really struggle and need a professional.	Less bureaucracy so that things could be done more quickly and efficiently.
A longer term plan for lessons/activities so I can prepare/plan how to instruct and supervise children	Not expecting children to do 'class work' when it is obviously too difficult	Using my spare time away from the pupils to help the teacher with general classroom duties

The previous sections may have triggered some of the above responses which reflect concerns expressed earlier, especially those relating to communication. Comments recorded under 'Supporting Learning' indicate that assistants are aware of the need for differentiated tasks; intended outcomes; scaffolding tasks in the 'zone of proximal development' by understanding what children can do unaided and when they will need help. When the assistants in Copse End Primary School were interviewed as a group they raised many concerns also highlighted by responses to the questionnaire. The changes to the way in which they did their job since the introduction of National Literacy Strategy was a major worry especially having the responsibility of managing a group of children who found reading and writing difficult. They questioned why they were no longer helping individual children and felt that insufficient time was devoted to the weakest. The assistants felt that if they were needed to work with a group it should be with children who would be able to progress *'with a bit of support'*. All the assistants in Copse End were given a plan of the literacy hour at the beginning of each week but did not have the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the texts. This is not altogether surprising as, in common with many schools, teachers were planning the literacy hour in detail over the weekend. Assistants also found recording what individual children had said and done difficult when managing a group whereas previously they had used their own individual records to help them decide what, and how, to support a pupil. As one KS2 assistant stated, *"I know whether to move him up to the next stage of the reading scheme or whether to find some supplementary books at the same level" (sic).* The assistants at Copse End had all been included in the training for Module 1 of the Literacy Hour and, therefore, had some understanding of the principles on which the National Literacy Strategy was based. The interview with them suggested that they were not sure how successful it would be in improving literacy development for the weakest children. The issue of training for assistants is dealt with next.

Questions 13 & 14: Training for classroom assistants

Nine of the 47 assistants had not received any job-related training. No recently appointed assistant (in post for less than one year) had received any induction training. Access to training, as already indicated, varied enormously from school to school and I will look at this more closely in the section, which examines continuities and discontinuities across schools.

The questionnaire and interviews also asked about the training assistants would like. Courses on behaviour management were a high priority and possibly reflected the level of concern over managing groups of pupils during the literacy hour – a concern which would also be reflected when interviewing assistants in phase three. Assistants also requested courses on computer and numeracy training: it was not clear whether this was at their own level, to support children or in connection with the proposed Government initiatives on numeracy and information communication technology. Four assistants requested *"funded, in-depth long courses for assistants."* One assistant pleaded for *"anything which would help with the job of assistant"*. Eight did not feel the need for any training. Comments included:

> I seem to have learnt so much by watching and listening, the 'hands on' approach works for me. (In post for seven years).
> No, we have plenty of support from the teacher.

HMI (1992) refers to assistants 'learning on the job' rather than being given any 'tailored training'. However, most assistants who attended local authority run courses in connection with National Literacy Strategy stated on the evaluation forms that *'talking to other assistants and finding out how things were tackled in other schools'* was one of the most useful parts of such courses. This point of view is certainly reflected in conferences I have attended in connection with the work of assistants. Several assistants in replying to the questionnaire survey felt that, through the skills and experience they had acquired, they could make a contribution to areas such

as curriculum planning, writing school policies and supporting low achieving children and building their confidence. One assistant who thought she could contribute wrote, however, *"quite a lot but no one would probably listen". (sic)*

THE SUPPORT ASSISTANTS OFFERED CHILDREN ENGAGED IN LANGUAGE AND LITERACY TASKS.

The tables below set out the support assistants reported giving in the areas of speaking and listening, reading and writing.

1. Speaking and listening

TABLE 4:8 – Question 1: Summary of the ways in which assistants' support speaking and listening

Support	Reason
Ensuring children had listened to the teacher	In order to recall instructions and so that the assistant could check that the information had been understood.
Listening to sounds	To help children develop the phonic skills necessary for reading. and writing.
Playing games	To develop memory skills, build a sight vocabulary, help with sound/symbol association, listen to instructions, co-operate with others in the group in turn taking.
Expanding and extending vocabulary	KS1: help children to understand basic vocabulary such as over, under, above, behind: using pronouns correctly. KS2: subject specific vocabulary as well as particular words the assistant felt the children might not know.
Oral recall/rehearsal	To help children prepare a sentence orally before writing; plan a story
Discussing texts and questioning children	To develop comprehension through analysing texts, using context, predicting outcomes and to explore emotions and feelings
Reading to and with children	To develop knowledge of books and book language; help children use the pictures to retell stories; develop understanding of texts; discuss favourite books and stories to build enjoyment; help children access texts which were too difficult for them.

The various activities as described above by assistants answering the questionnaire were all observed at some point in my research. In addition assistants reported encouraging children to develop ideas and think things through, discussing with them how to approach tasks and/or arrive at answers. One assistant wrote, *"I help children develop verbal reasoning skills, object association, object function", (sic)* which sounds as though she might have adopted the discourse of the school or speech therapist, the 'teacherly talk' referred to by Woods (1987). Another wrote, *"I act as a back-up to the teacher helping to give confidence and provide encouragement".*

2. Reading

The majority of assistants heard children read. Responses to the questionnaire and observations at the time revealed that, for many assistants, the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy had had a major effect on the way in which they worked. They were much more likely to be supporting 'group reading' during the literacy hour than hearing individual children read. Assistants interviewed during this time expressed concern that instead of being able to offer 'dedicated' support to an individual, they were expected to manage a group. Assistants who had been appointed to support an individual pupil with special educational needs felt that their dedicated time for that child was reduced by the demands of other children in the group. One assistant in Baker School who supported a partially sighted pupil was particularly concerned that she was not able to guide the child through the enlarged worksheets quite so effectively because she was supporting other children in the group, none of whom were very good readers.

TABLE 4:9 – Question No. 2: Summary of the ways in which assistants' support reading development

Word recognition	Comprehension	Book Knowledge	Syntax
Used published phonic programmes the most popular being P.A.T.	Discussing settings, characters and events. Drawing characters from the text.	Discussing cover, author, illustrator, title, blurb.	Paying attention to punctuation when reading.
Using computer programmes to build knowledge of phoneme/grapheme correspondence.	Helping children identify cues: use of context, cause and effect, prediction.	Talking about different text genres.	Making up sentences using word cards
High frequency word recognition: sight vocabulary for a particular book/text. Use of flashcards/bingo/pairs/ games	Discussing words in the text to expand vocabulary. Using a dictionary/thesaurus. Scanning a passage before reading to 'get the gist' and identify tricky words		
Testing to see if children have mastered certain phonic elements	Questioning to check understanding		

Many of the activities listed above reflected text, sentence and word level work from the literacy hour. Six of the eight schools visited at this time had taken part in the First Steps Literacy Programme that had been initiated earlier by the Local Education Authority and which was similar in a number of ways to the National Literacy Strategy.

Two KS1 assistants stressed the importance of helping children enjoy reading, one through discussing what they liked and disliked and another by matching books to the child's interests and hobbies. Another assistant working in KS2 reported that she was asked to test pupils' reading ages. Although this does not appear to be a common practice, one of the assistants interviewed, who also tests reading ages in Y5 & Y6 stated, *"OK, so I can give children a reading test, but how does that help the teacher plan a programme for them?"(sic)*

3. Writing

In response to the question about writing, although a number of activities are listed by assistants, over half referred to handwriting and this may have been a result of the phrasing of the question, or perhaps assistants support handwriting activities more than they do composition.

TABLE 4:10 – Question 3: Summary of the ways in which assistants support the development of writing

Handwriting	Spelling	Composition
Reminding children to sit properly, hold their pencils correctly, form letters correctly, develop a legible script	Help children use word lists	Encourage children to write in sentences using correct tenses and punctuation
Helping children to keep to the lines, trace over letters on paper, in sand, join dotted letter shapes	Help children find words in a dictionary	Supervise work set by the teacher
		Recall stories in pictures or words: comic strips, speech bubbles
		Complete comprehension exercises. Read anything they find difficult to help them formulate answers in their own words
		Act as a scribe to get children's ideas down on paper. Noting ideas and helping them build these into their writing
		Play games that encourage sentence building, e.g. expanding sentences by adding adverbs/adjectives. *Additional Learning Support materials use this strategy*
		Work with a group on a shared writing task.

One assistant described her role as 'kick-starting' the writing process by jotting down all the ideas the children threw at her, no matter how wild. During one of my observations an assistant in Grove School carried out an activity of this kind. In preparation for some work on a text she had written DANGER in large, red capital letters on a sheet of paper and was inviting the children to think of as many dangerous situations as they could in five minutes: fire, police, ambulance, drowning, fighting, car crash, plane crash, breaking a leg, getting run over, buried alive and falling over were among the suggestions the children shouted out. She then read the following excerpt from War Boy, by Michel Foreman (1989):

> Mother grabbed me from the bed. The night sky was filled with lights. Searchlights, anti-aircraft fire, stars and a bomber's moon. The sky bounced as my mother ran. Just as we reached our dug-out across the street, the sky flared red as the church exploded. (p. 11)

When talking to her afterwards she said:

> Well, you see, I have this Y6 group. I do some pre-teaching. They're not very switched on to books and certainly not to writing. Sometimes I look at words they're going to find difficult but at others, well, um I think they need to catch the mood. I try and link it in to something they know.

When I asked her where she had got the idea from she said listening to serialisations of books on the radio when she was a child, *"There was always the 'crunch' point. You had to listen the next day to find out what happened – mind you, you didn't have to write about it afterwards!"* An illustration like this suggests that not only is the assistant building on her own literacy history and personal practices but using her knowledge of the children to forge that bridge between home and school a link an assistant is ideally placed to make as discussed in chapter 2.

Many reading and writing activities, quite naturally, overlap with the speaking and listening activities. As Heath's research (1983) shows, the

routes of reading are partly established in the 'ways of taking' from oracy and oral traditions. The results of my own observations and interviews confirm that the activities listed in Table 4:10 are common forms of support. I shall discuss my own direct observations of assistants' language and literacy activities with children in more detail in chapter 5.

Answers to a questionnaire do not record either the quantity or the quality of support provided. The majority of assistants, especially in KS2, supported children who were experiencing some level of difficulty in acquiring literacy skills. They often supported the same group both in the literacy hour and for individual or small group withdrawal sessions. It was during the latter that games were played and programmes such as Phonological Awareness Training (PAT) materials were used. However there are differences in the ways assistant use the PAT materials. For instance, an assistant in White Park Junior school was observed working with a group of Y3 children on the PAT programme. The children were withdrawn to the library for a session lasting about 10 minutes during which the assistant drew their attention to the 'rime' for the week *(et at the end of pet)* and told them which initial letters would generate a word. The children wrote the words, had their homework marked, received new homework sheets and returned to class. The assistant conscientiously recorded the worksheets each group had completed. In the Grove primary school an assistant working with Y3 pupils had made sets of cards to accompany each worksheet. The initial letters in green and the rimes in red. The children had to build sets of real words and non-words before tackling the worksheet and then choose their favourite non-word as the name for the monster of the week. Both assistants carried out the allotted task but in the Grove primary school the assistant had looked for ways to explore the structure of words with the children by creating a game which was both relevant to the task and interesting and motivating to the children. Neither teacher was aware of the manner in which the PAT programme was delivered.

The emphasis on phonics, both in the literacy hour and through the use of programmes such as PAT can lead to an assistant, particularly one who has recently been appointed, stressing sound symbol relationships to the exclusion of all other cues. A recently appointed assistant in Rainbow school, Mrs. P.J. was working on a patterned language text, entitled 'Pete's New Shoes' the type of predictable text that Meek (1998) suggests supports the young reader. (see chapter 2). Sean is scanning the pictures for clues.

Text	*. Sean's attempt*	*Mrs. P.J's cues*
Pete tried on some brown shoes. 'They're too tight' said Pete.	Pete tried on some, I know, I know, black boots The brown shoes were too (pause)	br ow n/brown sh oes/shoes t igh t/tight
He tried on some black shoes. 'They're too big' said Pete	He tried on some big He tried on some black shoes They are too big	No, No, follow the words, bl a ck Yes that's right No 'are'
He tried on some shoes with laces	He tried on some with locks	No, no, look at the word – sound it out l a ces
He tried on some shoes with straps. The straps stuck together by themselves.	He tried on some shoes with (pause) straps. They (pause) stuck to get	s t r a p s/straps s t u ck/stuck No, no, sound it out – to g e th er

Mrs. P.J. and Sean struggle through the book until Pete finds a pair of shoes. Some of the vocabulary, *laces/buckles* is unfamiliar to Sean. The last line reads, 'Thank Goodness' said Mum. Mrs. P.J. continues to offer phonic cues, *'Break it down, th a nk g oo d n e ss'*. Sean then reads the words as *'Thank you'*. Moyles (1997) suggests that assistants are best suited to supporting the mechanical aspects of children's learning. This example indicates that an inappropriate emphasis on the phonic reading is less than helpful. Sean gave up trying to decode unknown words himself and relied on the assistant to sound them out and then provide the correct word. This raises two issues: training for new assistants and the need for the teacher to be aware of the support an assistant is offering an immature reader.

Introduction

One of the aims of the research project was to explore to what extent assistants' own language histories and literacy practices affected the ways in which they worked in schools. This was difficult to tease out from answers to the questionnaire. The observations suggested that, when they had insufficient information about an activity, assistants may either rely on their own practices or adopt what they saw as the 'school' way of supporting children's literacy development. The other aspect of a questionnaire, which cannot be overlooked, is that literate people are more likely to complete them. An assistant, who had qualms about her own ability to write, is unlikely to have completed such a lengthy questionnaire. Where schools have a choice of applicants to recruit from, especially when many assistants will have worked in a voluntary or 'dinner lady' capacity, they are likely to choose the most literate and those whose approaches appear most in line with the school's philosophy. A few questionnaires contained spelling mistakes, but these may have been 'slips of the pen'. Visits to schools did, however, confirm that some assistants are not completely confident about their own spelling – one assistant asked, *"How many Rs are there in buried*?"

Questions 25a – 32: The language & literacy histories and personal practices of classroom assistants

One aspect of learning to read which was mentioned by many assistants, both on the questionnaire returns and during interviews in the pilot school, were the two reading schemes Janet & John and Peter & Jane. As discussed in chapter 2, such schemes have been criticised on the grounds of language structure, gender and class stereotyping and their lack of relevance to a large number of children. It would have been useful to find out whether teachers, most of whom fall into the same age range as the assistants, recall learning to read on the same schemes as this would indicate that, in this respect, both groups had experienced a common 'school induction' into literacy.

What was obvious from answers to the questionnaire was the delight the majority of assistants recalled from experiences of reading during childhood. Forty-six assistants recalled being read to as children. Nineteen cited both parents as the reader, eighteen just mum and one just dad. Two could only remember being read to by teachers. Six assistants mentioned being read to by several people including parents, grandparents, siblings and teachers, indicating that they were part of a 'literacy heritage'.

Many assistants recalled the experience of being read to as thoroughly enjoyable. Various emotions were expressed: comfort, excitement and a sense of peace and delight. Some quotations suggest how the experience may have inducted the child listener into the 'society of readers'. For instance, *"Favourite books, knowing them by heart." "Visions of the stories in my mind for a long time and thinking about them". "A cosy experience. A part of the day to look forward to". "Sitting on my mother's lap with a book and loving the sound of her voice". "How many pages can we have tonight". "Anticipation – what will happen next."* The 'danger' activity on p.91 shows how an assistant might use her own family language practices to support the children with whom she works.

Responses from other assistants were linked closely to the literacy practices they used with their own sons and daughters at home. Because they loved stories they assumed their children would too. One assistant wrote, *"When Louise was born I joined a children's book club so she would always have stories to listen to, too".* Another assistant wrote, *"My all time favourite book is 'The Silver Sword' by Ian Serralier. I have just purchased a copy for my son after many years searching."*

Thirty assistants wrote about learning to read and write some with more pleasure and ease than others. Positive experiences included the following:

> *It came very easily to me. I was constantly reading and writing whatever and wherever I could.*
>
> *I cannot remember not being able to read. I always played with pens and paper even thought I couldn't write very well when I was little. I always played schools and pretended to write reports and things.*

The thrill of having a little book and being able to write little notes to my family.

I went to school at four-and-a-half able to read and write as I had a lot of encouragement from my mother who taught me the basics before school. I also loved learning which was a great help and I went to a lovely small primary school.

Other assistants found school reading less enjoyable, for instance:

Reading was repetitive and boring because I could read before I went to school.

I remember tests which I didn't enjoy, as I wasn't a particularly confident reader.

Horrors! I went to a village school – 1 teacher, 1 class – pupils aged 5-11 years.

Sitting in a circle and reading a page or so at a time to the teacher.

Several assistants, in connection with the Janet and John books, recalled a range of reading strategies being employed, such as flashcards, breaking down words, handwriting and tracing words, the mix of methods being used as reported by HMI (1992). One assistant remembered it as the 'look and guess' method, suggesting that she would have approved of a more 'phonics based' approach. For some assistants, their memories of learning handwriting, especially with a 'nibbed' pen, were not a cherished experience. Assistants interviewed during this phase reported very similar experiences although none reported the 'horrors' mentioned above. Of course, it may be easier to disparage schooling on a questionnaire than in a face-to-face interview with someone who represents the establishment!

Most assistants could recall a range of reading and writing activities that they had done at home during childhood. Some were very short and vague, for instance: 'various books and comics', 'the classics', the Ladybird abridged stories', 'biographies and auto-biographies' and 'reference books'. Other assistants listed categories of books: adventure stories, ballet, horses, fairy stories and books on school life. More than half mentioned reading

books by Enid Blyton; one even wrote 'sorry' by her entry, recalling the time when Blyton was 'politically incorrect'. Other assistants wrote about what they remembered about their reading and writing in more depth, and gave a flavour of the engagement with reading that many felt.

> *I have always had a passion for writing poetry and stories - this very much coincided with the things I loved reading. I always did a lot of reading as a child. I loved the Nancy Drew mysteries and all the classics, Jane Austin and the Bronte sisters.*
>
> *Always had lots of books to read at home and at the library, fiction and non-fiction, (family hobby). Wrote for pleasure at home and school at all ages. Desperate to read the Famous Five books (had them read to me). When older anything and everything especially fiction, fantasy and historical novels.*
>
> *Reading in bed first thing in the morning, last thing at night, always reading in the car and on long journeys.*
>
> *I read everything I could get my hands on. Joined the local library when I was seven. I was always making up stories in my head whilst playing with my dolls, etc.*
>
> *I didn't like the 'classics' so much, partly because I won prizes at primary school every year and they were always Dickens, Bronte or similar. I'm not sure I read even those!!*

Some remarks reflected the age of the assistant, *"Did a lot of reading – no TV"*. A list of books mentioned by assistants is included in *Appendix K.*

These responses to the questionnaire offer an overview of assistants' childhood experiences – avid readers who wanted to pass their enthusiasm on to their children and who see reading as more than a functional necessity. Because all the assistants are women, the snapshot offers what might be called 'a girl's eye view': what boys were reading and writing is not represented. The possible gender issue will be looked at in chapter 6 which discusses educational and policy implications related to the findings.
The next section looks at the range of ways assistants who answered the questionnaire inducted their own children into literacy and the range of literacy practices used in the family.

On page 91, I gave an example from an observation of an assistant drawing on her literacy practices to support children's writing. The following example records Mrs. S.T. supporting her 'regular' Y6 group of 5 pupils, which includes a partially sighted child, during the literacy hour at Baker Primary School during the autumn term 1998. Mrs. S.T. was educated to 'A' level standard and had worked in a secretarial capacity until marriage and children. Her qualifications and experience mean that she is able to help pupils with the spelling and grammatical aspects of writing. The task was to re-write part of an excerpt from 'She' taken from the LCP files, to put the stepmother in a more favourable light. This is linked to the National Literacy Strategy text level objective of looking at characters from another perspective. The teacher, Mrs. P. has read the excerpt with the class and the pupils have made suggestions that the stepmother, Doreen, could use so that her requests sounded friendlier towards Gogi. Mrs. S.T. re-reads the excerpt to the group and reminds the children that 'She' is Doreen, the stepmother.

Mrs. S.T.	We've got to change this. How can we rephrase this *(referring to the text)* to make it sound nicer? *(Gives the spelling of the word 'please' to Ashley who has already begun to write)* If it is direct speech, what do we need.....?
Ashley	Speech marks
Mrs. S.T.	Yes, "Please can you do this job for me.. what to you need at the end?
Rebecca	Speech marks, "Please do this for me?" I asked Gogi
Mrs. S.T.	Instead of 'she' what would we write *(pause whilst she waited for a reply)* Who would she ask, Ashley?
Ashley	Gogi
Mrs. S.T.	You can miss out the bit about her wagging her finger, as it doesn't sound very nice. *(Reads from the text)* "When you have done this I will ***inspect*** *(word emphasised)* it".
Charlotte	***Inspect*** *(questioning tone)*
Mrs. S.T.	Um we don't want ***inspect*** it sounds too hard.
Paul	When you have finished it I'll have a look
Mrs. S.T.	She wants to see it? *(questioning tone)*
Jamie	I'll look to see if you have done it properly
Mrs. S.T.	Still sounds a bit strict. *(Then to the group)* You can say done or finished.
Children (in chorus)	How do you spell finished?
Mrs. S.T.	How do you think? *(The children offer suggestions and Mrs. S.T. gives clues and pointers such as, 'How do you spell fin? Which two letters make the 'sh' sound?)*
Paul	Can I say, "Have a little look?"
Mrs. S.T.	Yes, OK. *(in an encouraging tone)*

Mrs. S.T, who has a copy of the objectives, supports the group with the secretarial aspects of the writing task by drawing the children's attention to conventions such as speech marks, and giving them clues to spelling, building on elements she knows they know such as 'fin' and 'sh'. She also helps children appreciate how words can be used to change the tone of a passage. Through the use of her voice, questioning, encouraging and by picking up on what the children suggest she supports them in moving from 'inspect' to 'have a little look'. The secretarial aspects were dealt with in a much more matter of fact tone. No written record of the session was kept, but Mrs. S.T. through close involvement with the group over the term, scaffolds the learning. The choice of 'finished' rather than 'done' by the children indicates that they are aware of the former being a more appropriate word.

As the session draws to a close Mrs. S.T. remarks to the group that she 'lets her daughter off the washing up to do homework', because 'homework is important'. Such a remark implies that Mrs. S.T's home literacy practices echo the values and beliefs that children meet in school. The strategies Mrs. S.T. used, her encouraging tone and her rephrasing children's answers were very similar to those used by the teacher during the text level work at the beginning of the lesson. Her remark about homework suggests that her 'ways of taking' are similar to the 'mainstream' ways of the school. (Heath, 1983).

During the recorded semi-structured interview there were other indications that Mrs. S.T. uses strategies from her personal literacy practices to support children. She stated:

> I would like to find out how to bring children on once started – tend to do so by common sense and the ways I used with my own children, but I would like some guidance.

The observation demonstrated the ways in which Mrs. S.T. supported the children in completing the task. Her concern, expressed above, was also apparent from her remark regarding Paul's level of phonic skills, "Paul knows all his sounds but can't make a word."

Mrs. S.T. was aware that teaching children to master the sound/symbol correspondence is not necessarily going to help them become literate. Mrs. S.T. would also like help in knowing how to draw children out in the group session and how to prevent some children taking over so that she can encourage others to answer questions. "Some think it's 'not cool' to be seen with their hands up – swots." This example shows her awareness that some pupils, in order to fit in with peer-based social and cultural mores, adopt particular 'ways of taking' which do not match the preferred ways of the institution.

Clark (2000) in a recent critique of the way writing is taught using the National Literacy Strategy in KS1stated:

> ....it can be argued that effective teachers, with a secure grounding in their subject knowledge, are sufficiently flexible to match their practice to personal belief systems. Their delivery of structured, explicit and motivating teaching is thus fuelled by self-confidence. In contrast, the perceived National Literacy Strategy emphasis on form, uniform goals and organisation is likely to *reduce* teacher confidence born from this deeper understanding. Individual voice – both the teacher's and the young author's is in danger of getting lost. (p.72).

If being expected to suspend 'personal belief systems' when introducing a new strategy *reduces* teacher confidence then the effect on the classroom assistant, who needs guidance from the teacher in order to adjust to her new role, must be even greater.

Conclusion

As indicated in the previous chapter the sampling during phase two cannot in any way be considered as representative of the authority's schools given the skewed nature of the response. Only 47 assistants, out of over 200 employed in the authority's schools, completed the questionnaire and the majority of these worked in the schools I supported as part of my professional role. Nor can it be said to be representative of the work of classroom assistants nation-wide. Other evidence will need to be offered to substantiate or negate any claims. However, there are common threads running through the responses as assistants' roles continue to evolve to meet new demands. These echo the findings of the NUT (1998) survey.

The information gathered from the questionnaire, interviews and observations showed a wide variation in the ways classroom assistants were used. This applied within and across settings. In some schools the classroom assistants were an integral part of the school team. This team spirit was more obvious in KS1schools than in KS2 or in 5-11 primary schools. Liaison between teachers and assistants varied from very little to a high level of involvement in planning, record keeping, evaluation and review. In some schools assistants were included in school based training as well as being sent on specific courses during 'paid time', in others although welcome to take part in courses this was unpaid.

In the majority of schools assistants shared the same staffroom for coffee and lunch breaks and it was often during these times that assistants reported being able to have a few words about the children they were supporting. This was particularly important when no formal liaison time had been set aside. Quotations on pages 80-85 indicate the variety of practice. In a few schools, assistants took their breaks in a separate room and in one case at a separate time because they were required to be on playground duty. The head of one school stated that he had adopted this policy, as he wanted teachers to be free to discuss confidential matters relating to individual

pupils and school policy without putting the assistants, or teachers, in a difficult position.

This chapter has examined the work of classroom assistants from replies received via a questionnaire survey from 20/39 primary schools in the authority and brief observations and interviews in 8 schools. The implementation of the National Literacy Strategy during this period had an effect on the way assistants were deployed which could not have been envisaged at the outset of the research project. Teachers were struggling with a strategy that was not necessarily welcomed in all schools. This was especially true in schools in the cluster that had been running a First Steps Programme. There was a sense of ownership and partnership in those schools that had volunteered to become part of the programme and heads and teachers in these schools expressed some resentment at having a strategy imposed on them.

During this phase of the study few school policy documents were collected as all the schools were engaged in drawing up a Literacy Action Plan. In retrospect this was a mistake, as the existing documents would have offered further insights into school policies regarding the roles and responsibilities of assistants before the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy. However, the responses to the questionnaire, the interviews and observations all offered an insight into the range of practices followed in, and across, schools. The information highlighted the similarities and differences. In the eight schools visited teachers, who had an assistant available during the literacy hour, reported that they found their help invaluable – whether there had been close liaison with the assistant or not. Teachers were more likely to have an assistant working regularly in the class in KS1. In KS2 the majority of assistants were on a mixture of permanent and temporary contracts, the temporary element being funded to support children with special educational needs. The reduction of time allocated to a particular pupil so that the assistant could support a group during the literacy hour was a frequently raised concern. The management

characteristics and ethos of the schools influenced the status of the assistant. In some schools assistants were viewed as part of a professional team and were included in all aspects of school life. In other schools, the responses to the questionnaire would suggest that they played a more peripheral role and that the nature of their inclusion varied from class to class. The rewarding aspects of an assistant's job were very similar – working with children and seeing them make progress. The frustrating aspects of the job were related to an assistant's particular situation and appeared to be greatest in schools where assistants were not seen as part of the school team. Lack of communication was seen as being the greatest problem.

The language and literacy histories and personal practices of the assistants replying to the questionnaire were, as indicated, very similar and could be described in Heath's (1983) terms as 'mainstream'. These were not quite so uniform in the schools visited with some evidence of educational and cultural practices being more similar to Heath's description of the Roadville families. The continuities and discontinuities across settings were related to the management characteristics and ethos of the schools and the teachers in them. In some settings, even when the assistant was working in the classroom, she appeared to be apart from or outside it, rather than in it. This was observed both when an assistant was supporting a group in the literacy hour on the same shared reading and writing task as the rest of the class or whether she was working to support the acquisition of phonic work through a game or published programme – PAT being the most usual. Where liaison between the teacher and the assistant was part of the normal practice the assistant and the teacher were both in contact with the children's learning. When there was little liaison and the assistant was responsible for a task, without knowing in advance what needed to be done, the teacher lost contact with the children's learning and the assistant did not have access to the guidance needed to *'bring a child on'*. In these instances the assistant had to rely on her own perspective and sometimes her own personal practices, to support the pupils. Assistants' beliefs about literacy are revealed by the ways they talk about their home practices. Where an

assistant is confident about her beliefs she can draw on them to support what Czerniewska (1992) describes as 'the social interactive process by which children and teachers *(and assistants)* construct literacy' (p.128), as in the Danger excerpt. Alternatively, as in the Pete's New Shoes example, the assistant might feel that the strategy advocated by the school is to focus on phonics in order to improve a child's access to a text.

In some instances the assistants were pro-active in seeking solutions to their concerns. They adapted worksheets, read about particular syndromes and conditions and, in one case already quoted, devised their own discipline strategy. Sometimes this was done in conjunction with the teacher but frequently an assistant reported using 'common sense' or 'things that had worked with my own children'. A copy of the numbers of assistants out of the 47 who reported supporting children in particular ways and a copy of the range of language and literacy activities they reported they engaged in at home is included in *Appendix B.*

In general continuities and discontinuities are greater between KS1 and KS2 than they are within each Key Stage because assistants are more likely to be in the KS1 classes for a significant amount of time. Therefore, even if there was little in the way of planning for their deployment, liaison and training, they had a greater opportunity to form a partnership with the teacher and a close relationship with the children through sustained association. However, newly appointed assistants were at a disadvantage, even if they had worked in the school in another capacity, unless there was a well-planned induction programme – which was extremely rare.

The management characteristics of individual schools in respect of assistants were in place prior to the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy, and where these were of an inclusive nature they appear to have supported the work of both teachers and assistants when the strategy was implemented.

CHAPTER 5: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS – PHASE THREE INTERVIEWS, OBSERVATIONS AND COLLECTION OF POLICY DOCUMENTS IN THE THREE CORE SCHOOLS

Introduction

In chapter 4 I reported on the results from the questionnaire and the brief interviews and observations that were carried out in eight schools during phase two (see Table 3:2). This data provided information about the range of language and literacy activities assistants reported using to support pupils and the range of practices in schools regarding the status, deployment, management and training of assistants. The personal information collected about assistants showed that they were drawn from a wide range of social, educational and employment backgrounds as well as from a wide age range. The third phase of the research project focused on a more in-depth study of three schools, a KS1 infant school and two KS1/KS2 primary schools. This was undertaken to look more closely at the *how* as well as the *what* regarding the ways in which assistants supported the acquisition and development of language and literacy.

The schools reflected, as far a possible with such a small number, the range of institutions investigated during phase two. That is, urban primary schools in close geographical proximity to those studied in phase two, which drew their pupils from a range of catchment areas. The school policies and practices also reflected the differences in the management styles and ethos of the schools. In order to look at differences between KS1 and KS2 I selected a 5-7 KS1 school and two 5-11 KS1/KS2 schools. I will discuss the information gathered in phase three in relation to the three research questions

1. The support assistants offered children engaged in language and literacy activities, as described by them in the semi-structured interviews and from the audio-taped sessions with pupils.
2. The ways in which school policies and practices affected the assistants' work. This will include references to policy documents collected and the information about the deployment of assistants given by the head teacher.

3. The language and literacy histories and personal practices of the assistants gathered through interviews and observations in the three schools.

I will first give a brief outline of the three schools and then discuss aspects of data collection from each school in turn. I begin with the interviews with head teachers and the contents of the schools English and Special Educational Needs policy documents and the assistants' job descriptions, in order to address research question two. Next I will look at question three, assistants' own language and literacy histories and personal practices and finally, I will discuss the observations of assistants working with children. Copies of the interview questions and observations schedules are included in *Appendix C*.

HEAD TEACHER INTERVIEWS AND SCHOOL POLICY DOCUMENTS

School A - KS1/2

School A was built in the 1970s on the outskirts of the town. The catchment area includes private and public housing and the head describes the children as coming from 'the whole spectrum of society'. In addition to supporting children's learning, the head Mrs. G thinks of assistants as a 'bridge between home and school'. Children will often share their joys and concerns with an assistant and the 'replacement mother figure' often comes out especially for the younger children. This 'bridge' in relation to language and literacy was a theme that was beginning to emerge from my analysis of the data from phases one and two. For instance, assistants might link learning to children's favourite hobbies and TV programmes. Clipson-Boyles (1996) in her handbook for early years' assistants, see chapter 2, also suggested that assistants are well placed to mediate between the language of home and school when supporting young children. Responses from the questionnaire indicate that assistants felt it was important to be aware of difficulties at home in order to understand and support children. The head has delegated the day-to-day management of the assistants to the senior assistant Mrs. S. B., a qualified teacher with special school experience, who is employed on a dual contract, 9 sessions as an assistant and 1 as a teacher. Mrs. S.B. oversees the work of the assistants, liaises with teachers, meets with outside

agencies and reports to the head regarding resource and training needs for the assistants. This arrangement is quite unique among all the schools visited in laying down clear communication and management channels. The team spirit and supportive ethos of the school is reflected in the inclusion of all staff, parents and pupils in every aspect of the school's work.

School B – KS1/2

School B is situated on the other side of town. The catchment area is mainly home ownership and parents tend to value education and support the work of the school. Parental expectations are high and a child's lack of progress will be challenged. Although the school buildings are old and accommodation is cramped the school is over-subscribed. The head manages the deployment of assistants and meets with them on a regular basis to inform them about changes and priorities. Teachers are responsible for the day-to-day management of the assistants during the period that they work in, or with, pupils from individual classes. One assistant is responsible, under the guidance of the Information Technology co-ordinator, for teaching computer skills to groups of Y5 and Y6 pupils. In KS1 the class teacher teaches the whole curriculum. However, in KS2, a system of form tutor and subject specialist teaching has been adopted. Therefore, no one teacher has an overview of the language and literacy aptitudes and abilities of the children across the whole curriculum. In contrast to school A, the teaching staff form one professional team whilst the assistants form a separate, but less cohesive ancillary team.

School C – KS1

School C was built between the wars. It is situated in the middle of town and is the feeder for the junior school that is on the same site. It is a popular school and draws from a mixture of public and private housing, although the intake is not quite as diverse as that of school A. The head, who also acts as the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, undertakes the deployment and day-to-day management of the assistants. Unlike school B there was an implicit partnership

between teachers and classroom assistants without it being the formal, explicit working relationship described in school A.

Head teacher interviews

Table 5:1 – Information provided by head teachers about the work of classroom assistants

	School A – Mrs. G.	School B – Mr. A.	School C. – Mrs T.
Contracts	Mixture of part-time, permanent and temporary. Temporary for ALS and pupils with SEN. Assistants are also used as lunchtime supervisors on a rota basis.	Mixture of part-time permanent and temporary. Temporary contracts for ALS and pupils with SEN.	Mixture of part-time permanent and temporary. 2/3 assistants are also lunchtime supervisors on a regular basis.
Job descriptions	No up-to-date job description	No up-to-date job description	Three main roles: Supporting children, Supporting the teacher by preparing materials and helping with general classroom management Supporting the school. (Undated)
Roles and responsibilities	YR – general support Y1 & Y2 literacy, numeracy & SEN Y4 – Y5 ALS Support Y4 – Y6 SEN support Y6 Literacy Booster Class Support	YR – general support Y1 & Y2 literacy, numeracy & SEN Y3 ALS support Y4 – Y6 SEN support Y5/Y6 Assistant tutors ICT groups Assistants also offer support as required by the teacher, especially in art and craft.	YR – general support Y1 & Y2 literacy, numeracy & SEN One assistant responsible for literacy & numeracy support on a withdrawal basis for individuals and groups of pupils experiencing difficulties
Liaison	Frequent formal meetings with the senior assistant who reports directly to the head. Clear lines of communication. Informal as concerns arise.	Formal meetings with the head	Formal meetings with the head. Established timetable of support for each year group
Training	High priority for all assistants, especially in relation to NLS/ALS: extra funding made available so that all assistants could attend. Support for an assistant wanting to do an accredited course. One assistant has done the Open University Specialist Teacher Assistant Course (STA)	Training is useful for specific aspects, e.g. ALS work. Members of staff, who have attended off-site courses, disseminate to the other assistants. Accredited courses should be transferable to employment outside education. Any training run by a LEA should be recognised throughout the country.	Training is a high priority. 2/3 assistants funded to do O.U. STA course. Assistants funded to attend other courses as appropriate.
Other	Assistants are an integral part of the staff team. They are included in every aspect of the school's work.	Teachers appreciate the help assistants can afford them.	Assistants are valuable members of staff supporting both pupils and teachers

ALS – Additional Learning Support Materials *SEN – Special Educational Needs*

Table 5:1 summarised the background information each head teacher provided regarding the roles and responsibilities of assistants but this only partly reflected the overall ethos in the schools with regard to the work and status of assistants. The three schools, like those involved in phases one and two of the research, employed assistants on a mixture of part-time temporary and permanent contracts in order to cater for pupils with special educational needs, new initiatives and budgetary constraints, a procedure also reported by the NUT (1998). (See chapter 2).

The biggest differences between the three schools was the head teachers' attitudes towards training for assistants and the ways in which assistants were deployed and managed. These differences did not come through clearly in the interviews with the head teachers, but became evident through my observations in the schools and interviews with assistants, underlining the importance of using evidence from a range of different sources.

In school A assistants were seen as an integral part of the school staff who were managed as a team. Training, especially in relation to literacy, as this affected all areas of the curriculum, was seen as a vital part of staff development and also as recognition of the professional contribution assistants made to pupils' learning.

In school C, the head teacher, Mrs. T. oversaw the management and deployment of staff herself. Mrs. T. saw training as a priority and two assistants were released and funded to study for the Open University Specialist Teacher Assistant Course, and the third, who is responsible for pupils with Special Education Needs was released to attend appropriate courses when they became available. Mrs. T. was concerned that assistants who had undergone recognised accredited training courses or who had gained experience through long service to the school did not have their skills and commitment recognised in their pay packets.

In school B, the head Mr. D. A. organised the deployment of assistants. However, individual teachers were responsible for the day-to-day management of assistants, who with the exception of Janice because of her Information Communication Technology skills, were viewed as an 'extra pair of hands'. Mr. D.A, the head in school B stated that any accredited training for assistants should have a wider currency than just a school specific qualification. He was, however, concerned that assistants were 'a bit out on a limb' and that pay differentials and a career structure should be available for assistants with specific skills, such as Information Communication Technology.

However, other less obvious differences emerged which may have more to do with the catchment area than was immediately evident. A high proportion of pupils in school B could be described in terms of Heath's (1983) 'mainstream' population. The management of the school, with its subject specific timetable, and the head's concerns that any training for assistants should have a wider employment currency than that needed for work in school, reflected a view of school as a preparation for work. Pupils need to acquire the disembedded and decontextualized type of literacy that can be shifted into other frames. The needs of the pupils in school A, which encompasses 'the whole spectrum of society' means that teachers had to plan for a wide range of literacy needs. Prior to the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy steps had been taken to address problems of underachievement in literacy. The resulting programme, which involved Joyce, a KS1 assistant, will be discussed later in connection with the interviews and observations. In KS1, in all three schools, assistants worked with the same teachers and groups of children on a regular basis. This type of close relationship was also reflected in data gathered in phase two, ensuring a fair degree of continuity between assistants, teachers and pupils, which is not so evident in KS2.

Another difference, which reflected the status of assistants in schools as part of a team, related to break times. In schools A and C the assistants shared the same staffroom and morning break times. In school B the assistants took their

morning break in a separate room. This may seem a small point but as reported in phase two, much of the liaison about pupils' needs is informal. In school B, the reduced opportunity for informal liaison and the implications of the segregation of assistants due to their perceived status were reflected in their lack of access to training or inclusion in planning for, and reporting on, pupils' needs and progress.

School policy documents

As already indicated in Table 5:1, the only undated job description collected, describing the assistants' roles and responsibilities, came from school C.
The following table sets out references to assistants' work in the Special Educational Needs and English policy documents. School A was the only school to have a policy for classroom assistants, which set out a clear but brief description of the general and specific duties and line management arrangements. This could be viewed as generic job description.

Table 5:2 – School policy documents: references to the work of assistants

	School A	School B	School C
SEN Policy	Mrs. SB is responsible for co-ordinating the work of assistants and reports to the head teacher as Senco	Supported in-class where possible by an assistant. (1997)	Support on a withdrawal basis and advice from SEN Assistant (1997)
English Policy	No mention (1999)	No mention (1999)	Assistants are encouraged to help in the teaching of reading (1995)

To summarise, although policy documents were not collected during phase two, observations and questionnaire responses suggested that the Special Educational Needs policy document was the one most likely to refer to the work of classroom assistants, and this was the case in the three core schools. Any reference to assistants work in supporting literacy in English policy documents was limited, in spite of the high profile they have in relation to the National Literacy Strategy and the delivery of the Additional Learning Support materials. No policy referred to the monitoring and evaluation of the work of classroom assistants, and given the lack of job descriptions, it would be difficult to see how this could be done.

The Special Educational Needs policies of all three schools were drawn up in 1997, possibly in response to the introduction of the Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs, and have not been updated since. They cannot, therefore, reflect the change and diversity of assistants' roles even when these specifically relate to the work assistants do to support pupils with special educational needs. The diverse practices, with much of the role being implicit rather than explicit were a feature of assistants' work also identified by Balshaw (1999). (See chapter 2) Information from other sources, conferences and inservice training sessions indicate that assistants' job descriptions, where they existed, were general rather than specific and not updated in line with developments.

THE CLASSROOM ASSISTANTS IN THE THREE CORE SCHOOLS

Table 5:3 – Data collection from the three core schools.

Assistants School A – KS1/2	***Data Collected – Autumn Term 1999/Spring Term 2000***
Sue B. – KS2 (a former teacher)	3 interviews of between 10 and 15 minutes on 3 occasions 1 observation ALS group –reading (20/25 minutes) 1 observation – hearing an individual child read (10 minutes) 1 unobserved audio-tape ALS group
Liz M. – KS1/2	3 interviews of between 10 and 15 minutes on 3 occasions 1 observation ALS group (20/25 minutes) 3 unobserved audio-tapes science investigation
Julie Q. – KS2	3 interviews of between 10 and 15 minutes on 3 occasions 1 observation ALS group (20/25 minutes) 1 observation NLS group – non-fiction reading (15 minutes) 1 unobserved audio-tape: Kimberley reading
Joyce G – KS1	3 interviews of between 10 and 15 minutes on 3 occasions 1 observation KS1 Literacy Group – 25/30 minutes 1 unobserved audio-tape of a pupil reading
Assistants – School B KS1/2	***Data Collected – Autumn Term 1999/Spring Term 2000***
Janice – KS2	2 interviews of between 15 and 20 minutes on 2 occasions 1 observation – 20/25 minutes ICT group
Sonya – KS1/2	2 interviews of between 15 and 20 minutes on 2 occasions 2 observed sessions - literacy work with 2 boys 1unobservaed session – hearing KS1 children read
Deborah – KS1/2	3 interviews of between 10 and 15 minutes on 3 occasions 1 observation – supporting NLS group – fireworks tape 1 observation – ALS group 20 minutes 1 unobserved audio tape supporting 2 pupils with spelling
Diana – KS2	2 interviews of between 10 and 15 minutes 1 observation ALS group (20/25 minutes) 1 unobserved tape recording ALS group of 6 pupils 1 observation – alphabet skills PAT group
Assistant- School C KS1	***Data Collected – Autumn Term 1999/Spring Term***
Sandra – SEN Assistant	3 interviews of between 10 and 15 minutes on 3 occasions 1 observation of alphabet skills – PAT - with an individual pupil
Karen – Y1	3 interviews of between 10 and 15 minutes on 3 occasions 1 observation working with a Y1 classroom 3 Little Pigs – 20 minutes 1 observation – talking about tadpoles 1 unobserved tape recording of Y1 pupil reading
Lesley – Y2	3 interviews of between 10 and 15 minutes 1 observation – working with paper mache – 15 minutes 1 observation – changing children's library books 40 minutes

Table 5:3 set out the data I negotiated to collect through observations and interviews with the assistants for analysis during phase three. Schools A and B, being all through primary schools, employ more assistants than school C, an infant school. The data collected across this range of school settings enabled me to compare the work of assistants working in KS1 in all three schools, and in KS2 in two schools.

As indicated in chapter 3, in order to be systematic, I arranged to collect similar data across the three schools and in the two key stages. By the time phase three of the research study began schools had settled into the routine of the literacy hour. However, the roles and responsibilities of classroom assistants in KS2 were being affected by the introduction the Additional Learning Support materials. In primary schools, as well as staff being recruited to deliver these new materials, existing classroom assistants were being re-deployed to teach groups of children in Y3 and Y4 whose SATs scores in English at the end of KS1 were at, or below, 2C.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH ELEVEN CLASSROOM ASSISTANTS IN THE THREE CORE SCHOOLS

Information regarding the assistants' ages, educational qualifications, previous employment and length of service as an assistant, mirrored that obtained in phase two from the questionnaire and interviews in the eight schools. Details are given in Table A in *Appendix F*. Five assistants had worked in the schools either as a lunchtime helper or volunteer prior to being offered a post – route reported by HMI (1992).

After gathering the information reported above I asked the assistants to tell me about their jobs. In schools A and B much of the work in KS2 revolved around delivery of the Additional Learning Support materials, which are described below.

The National Literacy Strategy Additional Learning Support Materials

The DfEE (1999) produced the Additional Learning Support materials, and these were introduced in order to support children in Year 3 and Year 4 who might need some additional help in order to attain a level 4 at the end of KS2 because of KS1 Standard Assessment Test scores of 2C or below. The materials were not designed for pupils with more severe difficulties. The four modules provided a programme of structured, graded, timed and scripted lessons. The large phonic element was to be delivered by the assistant under the teacher's supervision. The guided reading and writing elements were designed to be delivered by the teacher one week and then reinforced by the classroom assistant using the same text during the following week. Each module was designed to last eight weeks.

The lesson plans, with timings for each element of each lesson, for each of the four modules is set out in the handbooks. A copy of the lesson plans for two of the sessions observed have been included in *Appendix G.* The guidance states (DfEE, 1999):

> Additional Learning Support material is intended to be delivered during the group work session of the Literacy Hour by teachers and classroom assistants, working in partnership. (p.7).

The strategies adopted by the two schools in implementing this programme reflected the differences in management styles. The pressures raised by assistants during the interviews were different in school A and school B. This may be due, in part, to all the assistants in school A attending the local authority training sessions. Mrs. S.B. managed the deployment of the assistants, the preparation of the materials, and the monitoring of each of the 4 modules. In school B only one assistant and the English co-ordinator attended the training, which was then disseminated to the other assistants. In school A, pupils were taught in groups of 5 or 6, whereas in school B the children were in groups of 8 or 9. In addition to Y3 and Y4 pupils being included in Additional Learning Support groups in school A, the programme had been extended for pupils with low literacy skills in Y5. Assistants met regularly to review materials, monitor pupil progress, and

draw up end-of-module checklists and revision programmes. In this way all the assistants were involved in preparing for, running and reporting on the sessions. In school B each assistant prepared her own materials for each module leading to great diversity of practice and no sharing of successful strategies. Assistants found that with large groups they were unable to keep to the specified time for each activity so that, whereas the fast pace was of concern in both schools, it was felt to a greater extent in school B. The conflict between care and control raised by Woods (1987) was very evident from my interview with Deborah, who had been used to supporting individuals and small groups of pupils with literacy difficulties as well as making a significant contribution to pupils' work in art and craft. She stated, "*I used to enjoy my job, well, I suppose I still do but....*". (sic) Shortly afterwards Deborah was away from work with a stress related illness. Local authority colleagues reported that some assistants in other schools experienced similar difficulties and that there had been a number of resignations. School C, being a KS1 school, was not involved in the Additional Learning Support programme.

During phase two, responses to the questionnaire and interviews with assistants had highlighted that exploring issues of communication between teachers and assistants would be a high priority in order to understand the implicit and explicit practices in schools. Because of the way assistants are managed in school A communication was less of an issue than in school B. however, three concerns were raised. Firstly Liz, when referring to the Additional Learning Support sessions, was uncomfortable with the fact that teachers no longer delivered any of these lessons, believing assistants to be competent. She stated:

> They (the Additional Learning Support sessions) don't have quite the same status with the children, especially the older ones. Before, when the teacher took a session and I did the reinforcement, the children saw it as part of their education, not as an optional extra.

Joyce who worked in the infant department raised the second issue. She felt that liaison when the children move up from the infants to the juniors is good

between the teachers but that the junior assistants don't get involved with the younger infants owing to a lack of time. She reported that, as she runs the infant literacy programme, a project that was drawn up after she completed the Specialist Teacher Assistant course, liaison within the infant department is good. However, that was not always the case as Joyce reported:

> The teachers didn't actually have time to sit down and say, "Look, I want you to do this, then I want you to do that", so I thought, "I'm going to have to go and get the knowledge myself". It wasn't that they didn't want to, they.....it wasn't that. They...it's just the time.

The third concern, expressed by Julia and confirmed by Mrs. S.B, was liaison over the monitoring and evaluation of Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Julia remarked:

> It's the time factor, how do you run Additional Learning Support sessions, support individual pupils and get time to talk to teachers about IEPs – they (the teachers) haven't got any time, either."

In school B, liaison is infrequent and informal because of the subject specific timetable in the junior department and assistants and teachers taking coffee breaks in different rooms. Unlike school A, no liaison time is built into the assistants' timetable. Records of the reading scheme books read by each child are kept by Diana but these do not contain comments about reading strategies, errors or progress.

In school C liaison between teachers and assistants was frequent but informal. Apart from feedback at annual reviews on pupils with a statement of special educational needs, there were no formal records. Both Karen and Lesley felt that the National Literacy Strategy had undermined their role in keeping reading records because it was just not possible when supporting a group during the literacy hour. Sandra, who has been in post for 18 years, teaches children with literacy and numeracy difficulties for short sessions on a withdrawal basis. She has a wealth of knowledge about strategies and uses a wide range of resources to

support the development of literacy, many of which she had made herself. She kept detailed records, liaised closely with the teachers, and took a great deal of care to develop existing resources to meet particular needs. She stated:

> I use the National Literacy Strategy word lists and phonics and I think about which skills the children need. I'll do a set in the evening at home when I need a new one. Now for Kayleigh, I'm just concentrating on phonics for her group. *(Sandra pulls down a file and shows the games she has made based on the PAT programme to help children at Kayleigh's level master cvc words using onset and rime).*

In schools A and C, because assistants also carried out lunchtime supervisor duties on a rota, they got to know the children in the playground as well as in the classroom. Once their own duty was complete the assistants took their lunch in the staff room with the teachers and this provided another informal opportunity to pass on information. In school B, the only assistant on the premises at lunchtime was Janice who prepared computer work for her afternoon groups.

The roles carried out by assistants to support the acquisition and development of language and literacy in the three schools are similar, supporting children with special educational needs, delivering Additional Learning Support programmes, hearing reading and working with a group during the literacy hour. However, the management and deployment of assistants affected the type of communication there was between teachers and assistants, and indeed between assistants and assistants. The assistants in all three schools reported working at home to prepare materials and working unpaid hours in school in order to carry out their roles and responsibilities. The feeling of time pressure came through very strongly, both in relation to the pace of the Additional Learning Support sessions and for liaison. In schools A and C the assistants were viewed as part of the staff team, whereas in school B they were seen as a separate group. The diverse ways in which schools used and communicated with assistants was also apparent from data collected in phase two and reflects information reported in chapter 2.

LANGUAGE HISTORIES AND PERSONAL PRACTICES OF THE ASSISTANTS IN THE THREE CORE SCHOOLS

The third set of interview questions asked assistants in the three schools about their own memories of reading at home and learning to read in school, the ways they introduced their own children to books and the literacy activities they and their families pursue now.

A similar pattern emerged in the core schools to that found in the phase two data from the questionnaire and interviews. The assistants all saw reading as a key to knowledge and understanding as well as something to be enjoyed 'when there was time'.

In common with replies from assistants in phase two, the eleven assistants recalled being read to at home as children, mainly by their mothers. However, fathers' involvement in reading was not altogether missing. Two assistants recalled family literacy traditions very strongly. Sandra, from school C, describes herself as coming from '*what you might call a reading family*'. She recalled:

> What I really remember is Friday nights. We didn't have many books in the house, I don't think there was the money to buy them but every Friday night I used to go to library with my father and we'd change the books for the four of us. Mum always liked thrillers – Agatha Christie I can remember, Dad was interested in anything naval or military, read a lot of biographies, was well up on history and my brother, we'd get short story books for him. I remember Mum reading to him – he could read before he went to school, just sort of picked it up.

The love of reading, particularly history has stayed with Sandra, who together with her husband, also a great reader, belongs to the Cromwell society.

Joyce in school A recalled her own pleasure, and that of her husband, in reading to their children.

> I remember with my own children reading a story when they were older. It's the time you got close to them. I think this is what literacy is all about: building knowledge of the world, characters you may meet, seeing things and learning viewpoints which you may not come across in your everyday life. At home, I think it's also important for the child when it's just you and Mum, or just you and Dad – a time to share. My husband likes to read. We always read in front of the children. I think that helps because they see you reading – it's something they want to do because it's something adults do.

Karen, in school C, related how talking with her 11-year-old daughter about what she had been reading helped her empathise with someone else's situation:

> My eldest reads Jacqueline Wilson, provokes good discussion, for instance, if someone in a story doesn't have a mum, how that feels, how they cope.

This intuitive exploration of a fictive situation would prepare a child for the type of task reported in phase two of the research: i.e. Mrs. S.T. drawing on her own literacy practices to help children select an appropriate word in order to set the tone of the passage they were writing. Karen was also helping her daughter decontextualize her knowledge and shift it into another frame. (Heath, 1983 - see chapter 2).

Memories of learning to read were, as in phase two, often linked with the Janet and John and Peter and Jane reading schemes. Favourite reading material included books by Enid Blyton and comics. The older assistants also remarked that reading, as a leisure pastime, was much more common before the introduction of TV.

When asked to describe how they thought children learnt to read and write several assistants appear to have adopted the discourse of the literacy hour,

stressing the importance of phonics, paying attention to punctuation and understanding a range of text genres. Joyce, in school A, recalled the effect studying for the Specialist Teacher Assistant award, working on the KS1 Literacy Action Plan and the introduction of the literacy hour had had on her views:

> I find that a lot that the children are taught (in the literacy hour) in the text level and word level, we have been using in the literacy programme for years – it's like the book handling, that was never done in the classrooms – we picked up on that because we found that children didn't know who the author was. Also the fiction and non-fiction books – they tended to go for one type of book and they wouldn't touch perhaps the non-fiction. They had never been introduced to them. They didn't know what an index was, the contents or a blurb – anything like that. I was quite guilty of that when mine were young. I never used to say that was by such and such. I do it now because you are aware of how much you didn't do. I didn't really go for non-fiction books. When I first started here I would read a story to them (the children).

I then asked Joyce, "Is that because you enjoy fiction yourself?"

> No, it's because I thought children wouldn't understand it, the non-fiction. I think now that's terrible, a terrible thing. I used to think, 'Oh, they'll enjoy this one much better. They'll enjoy a fairy story'.

The interplay of family literacy and the work Joyce has undertaken in school indicates the 'non-static' element of literacy. Joyce reported that she uses the knowledge about books and literacy gained in school with her little granddaughter now, indicating the complex interplay between home and school literacy practices which children and adults experience.

The way family literacy practices are absorbed is encapsulated in remarks by Janice, in school B, when asked about how she thought children learnt to read:

> I've always taught children, my own children, to read in a practical way, heard them read, pointed out signs, that kind of thing. I can't remember much about learning to read but subconsciously I must have done because I hear my mum saying, when I'm working with Amber, my youngest daughter, 'I used to do that with you'.

Apart from the two husbands who were described as 'great readers' a similar pattern of work, newspaper and hobby related reading emerged as that found during phase two from the questionnaire and interviews. As sons got older they too dropped fiction reading in favour of reading about hobbies and sport. At home, and at school, therefore, reading and the teaching of reading and writing are something that is done mainly by women.

To summarise, the data about literacy histories and personal practices from interviews in the three core schools reveals a similar pattern to that found in phase two and indicates that there is an interplay between home and school practices. Assistants who had been included in tailored training and involved in planning appeared to reflect more on their work in schools and their home literacy practices. Assistants in KS1 were more likely to work consistently with the same teachers and the same groups of children. The fragmented approach for assistants working in KS2, as they move from class to class and group to group, meant that they observed a number of teachers all of whom have their own, individualistic ways of working. This may offer a breadth of models but lack of time and liaison meant that there were few opportunities for an assistant to sit down with the teachers and reflect on their input with pupils.

OBSERVATIONS OF ASSISTANTS WORKING WITH PUPILS ON LANGUAGE AND LITERACY ACTIVITIES IN THE THREE CORE SCHOOLS.

Introduction

Table 5:3 on page 112 sets out the data collected from the three core schools during autumn 1999 and spring 2000. As explained, the introduction of the

Additional Learning Support Materials had a significant impact on the ways in which assistants in KS2 were deployed. Therefore, in order to investigate assistants work in KS2, observing these sessions became a priority both in order to have similar data from the two schools and because this was now one of the main elements of the assistants' work. In order to collect other data as systematically as possible I arranged to observe an assistant in each school working with a group during the literacy hour, an assistant working on a skills based activity, i.e. using the PAT programme or similar phonic work and to collect from each assistant an unobserved tape recording of her working on an activity of her choice.

I selected the following observations from those recorded, see Table 5:3 on page 112, as these were typical of the differences in planning and delivery between the two KS2 schools, School A and School B. As already indicated this programme was not designed to be used in KS1.

Observations of assistants working with the Additional Learning Support materials

In School A, although initially teachers had been involved in teaching those elements of the Additional Learning Support materials as suggested in the guidance, the whole programme was soon passed over for the classroom assistants to deliver, supervised by Mrs. S. B, the senior assistant. In School B, the routine set out was followed but with much larger groups of children than suggested by the guidance. Neither school had managed to incorporate all the lessons into the 20-minute group work session during the literacy hour because it was impossible to timetable assistants, and provide an area for them to work in at these times.

The first observation I shall report on briefly, and which was typical of the sessions I watched in School A, is of Liz working with a group of five Y5 children, 3 boys and 2 girls on Module 2, Lesson 13. (*See Appendix G*). The aim, as set out in the Additional Learning Support scripted lesson plan, is to

explore spelling choices: ow, oe, o-e, ough, and o. Liz followed the set routine, as laid down in the lesson script, asking the children to suggest words which rhymed with the target word '*show*': As the children offered suggestions Liz wrote them up on the whiteboard. She used and extended children's suggestions, for instance, weave – sewing with a needle and thread, and she made children's spelling choices explicit by linking their suggestions to the rhyming element in the words that they were exploring. The pace was very fast.

Speaker	***Speech***	***Comment***
Liz	We are looking for 6 rhyming words from the word show	
Rebecca	Po	
Liz	How are you spelling that?	Seeking clarification
Rebecca	P O (letter names)	
Liz	You're thinking of the teletubbies, aren't you? *(laughter from the group)*	Cueing in to background knowledge
Liz	Well, it rhymes – we'll put it up *As the children suggest rhyming words Liz clarifies meaning and draws attention to homophones*	Accepting offer
Liz	Rebecca – you said 'so' just now. There are a lot of different 'so's. Do you know a different way of spelling so?	
Thomas	Sew – when you weave (*Making motions of sewing with a needle)*	Demonstrating to ensure his meaning is understood
Liz	Sewing with a needle and thread that's like that, isn't it?	Showing she knows what he means – and reinforcing the meaning for the rest of the group
Patrick	S O W E *(letter names)*	
Liz	You sow seeds, good. You don't need the 'e' on the end. *(several words ending 'ow' are suggested and written up)*	Clarifying spelling as she writes up the word to demonstrate
Liz	Can you think of some other spellings?	
Patrick	Through	
Liz	It's not thr 'o' – no 'r' sound. Try and say it to yourselves – split it into phonemes and say the word	
Thomas	bough	Liz is gradually moving children towards the correct phonemes and graphemes, building on what they know by helping them make knowledge explicit.
Liz	Nearly right, think of the rhymes	
Patrick	Though	
Liz	Though, good boy, 'th' 'ough'. What are the letters that make up the 'o' sound?	
ALL	O U G H *(letter names)*	

The lesson routine, which Liz and the children knew well, continued. A pack of word cards was shuffled and dealt to the children. They stated the spelling

alternative and put the word card on the correct (ow, oe, o-e, ough, o) pile. Mrs. S. B. and Liz had identified, during the advance planning for the session, any vocabulary, which might be unfamiliar to the children, and, as these words came up, Liz asked the children what they meant. Rebecca knew the word 'hoe' as Ho Ho and Liz explained that it is also a garden tool. Rebecca was also puzzled by 'dough' and Liz explained that you use it to make bread. At the end of the session Liz handed out the homework sheets that the children were expected to complete before the next Additional Learning Support lesson. These worksheets target high frequency words with irregular spelling patterns. The children were reluctant to take them. After the lesson I asked Liz what she thought about the Additional Learning Support work. She replied:

> I'm very lucky. The children grasp the concepts. I was really surprised that children in Y5, and even Y6 struggle with the basics and seem to be at the same level as my daughter in Y2. Such a shame! You think, 'Why haven't they taken it in?' It's very interesting. It's a real eye opener actually. I think it's going in. I think it's helping them. I can see they've got things now that, at the beginning of the course, they didn't understand. Some just don't take in anything. There's the odd one in each group that just doesn't want to know. I think they enjoy it on the whole and I'm sure it helps.

On my next visit, having transcribed the tape, I asked Liz about the reluctance to take the homework sheets. She explained there were two reasons. Firstly they don't like their classmates to see them with what they think of as 'baby work', and secondly, if there is little parental supervision of homework the children are unlikely 'to volunteer' to do it!

Liz was not the only assistant to experience problems with homework. Deborah in School B, where the majority of parents value education and support the ethos of the school, reported:

> The homework, the children are not doing their homework, especially if there are home problems. If a child has not

> developed the habit of escaping into a book before there are home problems, they are not going to when problems occur. Thinking about which letters are needed for the long 'a' sound in a particular word is not going to have a lot of significance if dad has just left home.

Deborah's comment sums up the view expressed by a number of assistants during interviews and in response to the questionnaire. Many assistants felt it was important to know when problems arose at home as it often explained inappropriate behaviour, lack of concentration and lack of interest in schoolwork. Deborah's term 'escaping into a book' suggests that readers can use a book as a refuge and, I would surmise, reflected her own literacy beliefs and values and those of the school catchment area. These examples indicated a continuity of concerns raised by different schools.

The next two brief excerpts from taped transcripts of Julia in School A and Deborah in School B highlight the discontinuities across schools. In the first brief excerpt, Julia's preparation for Module 1, lesson 18, reflected the planning strategy used by all assistants, in liaison with Mrs. S.B., throughout school A.

> We are going to use the 4-phoneme frame today. *(Four boxes into which the children will write a grapheme to represent each phoneme in a word).*
> Here are some of the words we are going to use:
> *Moult – my cat will moult.* That's when cats shed their fur.
> *Moat – water round a castle.* You've seen pictures in your history books.
> *Belt* – lots of meanings for that word, belt round the motorway, belt to keep your trousers up
> *Colt – a young male horse is called a colt.*

Words, which might be outside the children's vocabulary had been identified and specific, but brief examples were given which, were related to children's previous knowledge, for example, seeing cars belt round the local stretch of the motorway would be a familiar sight for the children. Julia was trying to scaffold the children's learning by relating the words they came across in the Additional Learning Support sessions to other experiences. Dadds (1999) in her research

paper on teachers' concern about the National Literacy Strategy stressed the importance of scaffolding children's new literacy learning by linking it with their existing linguistic resources.

An example of Deborah's awareness of children's home literacy practices has already been cited. (See p.125). However, in teaching the same lesson as Julia, Deborah is unaware that the meanings of some words may be unfamiliar to the children. She had not had a planning session with the English teacher or the literacy co-ordinator in school. She was simply asked to deliver each scripted lesson as set out in the handbook. During one of the semi-structured interview sessions she expressed concern about the amount of 'out-of-hours' preparation needed to read each lesson through and prepare the games.

The children are playing what is known as the 'sliding in game' using the 4-phoneme frame. The object is to use the letters **s, l, n + t** to alter cot to colt, coat to coast.

Deborah colt

Children colt

(Charlotte to Craig, "colt what's that, colt?)

Deborah does not pick up Charlotte's aside, and with a group of 8, rather than 5 children this is not surprising.

The differences in the amount of time devoted to training and supervision of assistants working with the Additional Learning Support materials was also apparent in the mastery of the correct terminology. During one session in School B, Deborah asked me if a consonant cluster was the same as a blend. The following excerpt shows that this was not the only confusion. One of the lesson's tricky words is 'yes'.

Deborah The word is **yes** – what does it sound like at the end?

Hannah A **z** (letter name)

Craig A double **s** (letter name)

Deborah A double **s**, yes it does but it's only one **s.** I don't want to see it with two ss.

Charlotte	Yesterday Evening Something *(using a learned memory aid)*
Children	Yesterday Evening South *(questioning tone)*
Megan	Yellow Egg Salad
Deborah	Yellow Egg Salad, that's a good one Megan. A lovely rhyme, isn't it? You think Yellow Egg Salad will help you remember it. Well-done if it does.

In contrast to Deborah's misuse of the term 'rhyme' the next excerpt shows Julia handling a child's misconception about the same terminology.

Julia	First today we are going to revise the spelling of because. Who can tell me how we remember because?
Children	Big Elephants Can Always Upset Small Elephants
Matthew	Those rhymes
Julia	Not rhymes – it's called a mnemonic – a way to help us remember.

In the examples given above, which are representative of those observed in the two KS2 departments, several points emerged in relation to the research questions. The policies and practices adopted by the school, whether implicit or explicit affected the ways in which assistants worked. Although it is an expression of confidence in the assistants that the work they do with children is competent, unless their work is supervised, monitored and evaluated, teachers cannot be aware of the contribution assistants' are making to children's learning. Indeed, the assistants might have known more about the children's abilities and progress than the teachers did because they worked with them in small groups on a regular basis. The Additional Learning Support materials were specifically designed to enable assistants to support the development of children's literacy. The belief seems to echo the opinion of Moyles (1997) that assistants can teach at a 'technical level'. (See chapter 2). However, if assistants deliver the scripted lessons without being aware of where the children need additional support and are not able, in their feedback to the teacher, to communicate this clearly, then the work they do may be less effective than was hoped. After all, many assistants reported learning to read on schemes like Janet and John. These obviously were not the only materials used to induct them into a literate culture

indicating that teaching materials are only one aspect of how children learn to read and write. The table below summarises assistants' opinions and reflections with regard to the Additional Learning Support materials.

Table 5:4 – Opinions expressed by assistants with reference to Additional Learning Support materials

Positive	Negative
Children are acquiring basic skills which they did not have before	Behaviour can be a big issue: group dynamics have to be considered very carefully.
The work on compound words was a useful introduction to longer words	Lack of revision time if a pupil is away – an element is only covered once
It makes you think about how literacy is taught throughout the school	Preparation time the first time you deliver a module
When teachers and assistants take turns in delivering the materials it builds in the necessary liaison. Teachers see the problems children have and can adjust class work	Teachers need to take their share, when they don't it devalues the work in the eyes of the children
	The high frequency words in each lesson seem a bit arbitrary and don't follow the pattern we've been teaching.
The writing element is good	All assistant should be properly trained
Preparing for the modules has made us look at the vocabulary children may not understand and build in work to improve this, too.	Loss of self-esteem and motivation for pupils who cannot keep up with the group. An exit strategy is needed for these children.
Examining the modules has helped us prepare revision sheets before children go on to the next module.	The pace is too fast for many – if they can't grasp it in a small group how are they going to transfer it to class work?

The collection and analysis of data highlighted the range of different approaches adopted by assistants in supporting pupils. In School A, where training and planning were made a priority and there were clear communication channels between assistants and teachers, Julia and Liz were able to support the children's learning as illustrated. The collaborative team approach helped them master the correct terminology to use in lessons and to identify and make explicit to the children the meanings of words such as colt, which might have been unfamiliar.

Assistants using phonic activities

Skills based learning, both during the Additional Learning Support sessions as described, and during other lessons, often illustrated the differences in approaches. An assistant teaching a group of children the 'ch' sound in school A used a range of pictures to illustrate the sound at the beginnings and ends of words thus linking pictorial examples to the sound/symbol association. In school B, an assistant who had been asked by the teacher to help Heidi master the 'ch' digraph was getting quite anxious and frustrated with Heidi who could not understand which letters to select and did not recognise the word 'chip' as a 'ch'

word. Fortunately the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator came along and said, "I don't think Heidi's ready for 'ch' yet, I'll have a word with the teacher.

Data collected from the questionnaire, the interviews and observations in phases two and three of the research project indicated that the Phonological Awareness Training (PAT), a published programme, is widely used. The worksheets are designed to help children build words using onset and rime. The children use initial letters, consonant blends or digraphs with a given rime to build new words, e.g. c + at = at. However, how assistants use the programme indicates some discontinuities across settings. Sandra, in school C, is careful to 'weed out' any non-words, such as 'lat' from the selection of letters she offers children. She feels that children, who are working on the early exercises, need to build words that they will find in their reading books and which she can point out to them. A copy of Sandra's interview comments regarding Kayleigh is included in *Appendix I*, as this illustrates both her knowledge of Kayleigh's difficulties and her liaison with Karen over her problems in class. The three sources regarding how Kayleigh functions in school, firstly with the tadpoles, then with the 'two titles' observation and lastly from Sandra's comments indicate the complex nature of learning. This tailoring of the work to the child's needs is not always apparent. In school B, Diana also supports the PAT programme. The programme is followed as set down. Each child in the group wrote words from the 'rime', in the case observed '-ot' by adding initial letters at the beginning. Diana checked that they made real words and ticked off the worksheet as completed in her records. There was no exploration of whether the children understood the meanings of words they have made, or that although 'yot' sounds the same, it is spelt in an unusual way, yacht. Neat handwriting and correct letter formation as each child wrote a word was stressed. Therefore, connections, which might be useful elsewhere, were not made. These different approaches appeared to be based partly on experience. Sandra has worked in the same infant school for many years and during this time has developed resources and strategies to meet the needs of children who were finding it difficult to become literate. Diana has had less experience, but this was not the only factor: she was

anxious that the children should complete the work in the allocated time but guidance about the links with other contexts, which needed to be made, were lacking. The lack of an explicit policy on involving assistants in the planning and review of their work with children and the dearth of opportunities for formal or informal liaison regarding their work appeared to reflect the status of assistants and management style and ethos of the school.

Of course, discontinuities are also obvious within, as well as across settings, as different demands are placed upon assistants. In the next excerpt the type of support that Karen in school C offered, firstly in an oral interaction with a group of Y1 children, and then when supporting a Y1 group during the literacy hour, illustrate the constraints placed on her. The first session is recorded as children come into school one Friday morning. There is the usual hustle and bustle as the children hang up their coats, put the lunch boxes on the appropriate shelf, and chat to Karen about incidentals as she helps them change into their indoor shoes. Several children gather round the aquarium and begin talking to Karen about the tadpoles. The conversation is relaxed.

Kevin asks a question

Speaker	*Speech*	*Comment*
Kevin	When can we hold them?	Referring to the tadpoles
Karen	How do you mean, hold them?	Seeking clarification
Kevin	Mrs. S (the teacher) she, she went to pick them up	
Karen	Ah, I see. When Mrs. S went to pick them up she meant from the pond, in a fishing net.	
Patrick	You can't pick them up, they're fish	Realises that Kevin has confused pick up and hold
Karen	Not fish –	
Kayleigh	The eggs are called frogspawn and they are like balls of jelly and in a month or four weeks they grow their back legs.... and then, and then later they um, grow their front legs and then they	*pause while she waits for another child to speak* *Demonstrating knowledge*
Callum	After that they lose their tail	
Karen	What do they grow into?	
Kevin	Frogs *(querying tone)*	*The children are called over for the register.* Karen has encouraged the children to solve Kevin's misunderstanding.*
Karen	Yes, frogs, so they are not fish, they're called amphibians. I suppose you could hold a frog, but I don't think it would like it very much.	

* *During registration a child has a nosebleed and Karen takes him out for attention.*

The interchange illustrated Karen's skill in guiding a learning experience. Her prompts were minimal and in the short session she scaffolded the children's learning by sorting out the confusion between 'pick up' when it means collect, and hold. When Patrick offered 'fish' she allowed the other children to explain what they knew, and only finally, as the brief session finishes Karen summarised the conversation and offer the children the correct word – amphibians. This could be viewed as an example of what Vygotsky (1994) refers to as 'concept formation' through using words as 'functional tools', or what Wells (1987) refers to as "the collaborative construction of meaning" (p.101). The children are absorbed in what they are doing and the conversation uses all the functions of language that Clipson-Boyles (1996) refers to: thinking, learning, communicating and socialising.

The next observed session focused on the guided work during the literacy hour and was based on the Framework for Teaching, Year 1, Term 2, Text Level Objective 9. The children were continuing work started earlier in the week – the writing of their own version of 'The Three Little Pigs' based on the big book version. During the shared session groups of children were assigned the parts of the first pig, the second pig, the third pig, the big bad wolf and the narrator. They read through the text as though it were a play. After the shared session the children were dismissed to their groups to complete their retelling of the story in the individual books they were making. Once they were seated the teacher wrote two versions of the title on the board, explained that the children could choose which one to use for the title of their own book: THE THREE LITTLE PIGS or The Three Little Pigs. The children in Karen's all had some degree of special educational need but were expected to attempt the same tasks as the rest of the class. The other children in the class knew that they may not interrupt the teacher and therefore all queries from unsupported groups were addressed to Karen. When Karen was distracted by other children those in her group found it difficult to work unaided. A laminated word list, setting out in alphabetical order about 50 key words for children to refer to as they wrote was on each table but it was

not used during the observed session. Throughout the session the unsupervised groups were noisy and had to be quietened down by the teacher several times.

Karen supporting a Y1 group during the literacy hour

Speaker	Speech	Comment
Karen	Kayleigh, is that your title, sweetheart? The title goes on the front, doesn't it, so we know what the book is called.	Basic book knowledge
Kayleigh	I'm doing the writing.	
Karen	Are you copying what's on the board? *(Turns to another child)* You have finished all your writing, haven't you, your story?	Making sure the teacher's instructions are carried out
Kevin	I need to do that one	
Karen	What's that one? What is it? What is it you want to do? Are you doing the title?	Trying to clarify what Kevin wants to do and ensure the title is written
Karen – to Patrick	Are you doing your title too? Where does the title come? Where do we look to find the title? If I look as this book, Patrick, where is the title? Where do we look to tell us what the book is called? Is this your book?	Invitation, re-phrasing question to ensure understanding. Making sure the set task is being done.
Patrick	Yes	
Karen	So where are you going to write it so it's like this book? Have you copied what's on the board Kayleigh? Where are you going to put your title?	

In contrast to the conversation with the children over the tadpoles, Karen is anxious, under the pressure of time, to make sure the children have done the required task. The emphasis in Moyles (1997) and Balshaw (1999) terms is reactive and stresses the product rather than the process. The language becomes what Hughes and Westlake (1997) term 'teacherly' that is 'talking, telling, commanding and evaluating' as is illustrated by the next piece of transcript:

> Right, Patrick doesn't need the ruler at the moment, but you need to do some writing. *(Addressing Kayleigh)* Put the ruler down because you can't write and hold the ruler, I don't think anybody needs the ruler now. I think everybody needs to do their writing now. Have you finished your story, Sam? You need to do the title page. So, where are you going to do that? Where are you going to write the title?

Woods (1978) refers to the conflict of 'care and control'. In the first episode there is no need for control. Karen has time to listen and respond to the children. In the second episode there is no gentle pause so that another child can explain: the 'need' to ensure that the task is complete overrides everything else and it is difficult to see what the children have learnt. Of course, Karen's anxiety to get the children to complete the task may have been exacerbated by my presence: proving she is a good teacher by acting what she sees as 'teacherly'. Throughout the session the talk was related to procedures: selecting one title from the two forms offered, writing this in the correct place and completing the written element of retelling the story. Karen did try to draw Patrick's attention to the title on a book in order to link what he was required to do with an example but the demands of the other children did not allow her to help Patrick, or any other child in the group, make the link. The scaffolding of the children's learning when talking about the tadpoles indicated that Karen has the necessary skills to support conceptual development but that the requirements of the literacy hour to achieve particular objectives as set out in the Framework for Teaching are reducing the opportunities. Karen's expressed concern about not being able to record what children have done during the group sessions also reduced the opportunities for her to reflect on, and discuss with the teacher, the strategies the children need to develop.

Karen was not able to use her skills and knowledge in the second episode, although her involvement every year during book week, shows how well she knows 'the power of the story'. She brings in the story quilts she made for her own children and retells the stories to groups of children using the quilts as illustrations, an activity which also demonstrates the links between home and school literacy practices.

The next observation I am going to report on is of Lesley, also in school C, working with groups of Y2 children who were changing their library books. Lesley was not sure I would find this session interesting, *"I'm only helping children change their books." (sic) (A complete list of the books brought back by*

the children is included Appendix J) I observed the library session and talked with Lesley afterwards.

Lesley – changing children's library books

Four or five children at a time from the Y2 classes came into the library and, with Lesley's help they changed their books. Lesley used her knowledge of the library books, the current fiction books the teachers were reading to the class, the era in history they were studying and the children's interests to help them select books. Lesley was constantly alert as the children talked to each other about the books they had read. When she overheard a child saying he would like to borrow a certain title she made a note to get it from the Y1 library for next week. A lot of incidental teaching went on. For instance, when Michael chose 'The Great History Search' from the Where's Wally series, Lesley said:

> 700 years BC, that's before Christ, BC, before Christ was born. That's a very long time ago. AD is after Christ. Lots of reading and lots of things you can spot. You will be able to tell me if you found Wally hiding among the tulips.

There were lots of invitations to the children to report back on what they had read, and they did. An indication of how Lesley had her 'finger on the reading pulse' is illustrated in this quotation, when we chatted after the session:

> Some of them (the children) will then draw pictures from the books they have borrowed. They are very keen, they are. If they've had say, a Roald Dahl story read to the whole class, well they'll choose a Roald Dahl book and read another story. It's quite interesting to see that Enid Blyton's still quite popular. I used to love those. The Sweet Shop one is quite popular. Last year the Animal Art books were very popular, especially with the girls, but this year they seem to like Dahl. This year it's very wide and varied, it's not one particular thing (genre).

Part of Lesley's role was to familiarise children with the fiction and non-fiction sections of the library and to guide children towards books they could read. She

was also aware of the self-esteem issue when weaker readers chose an inappropriately difficult book. For some children she suggested an easier book and for others that they asked mum or dad to read it with them.

> Some of the very good readers go for books below what they can read for relaxation. Reading is supposed to be enjoyable. The best readers choose below whereas others try to stretch themselves.

Throughout the 40-minute session it was clear that Lesley was very knowledgeable about the books and children's preferences and that the children were very secure in talking to her about books and accepting her guidance.

The recordings of Karen and Lesley working with the children indicated that, in some areas of the curriculum and with some pupils at least, the assistants knew at least as much as the teacher about the children's levels of language and literacy and were able to support them through that knowledge.

Sometimes the children take charge of the lesson in an unexpected way. Deborah, school B, was working with her regular group of less able readers in Y3 during the literacy hour.

Deborah and the firework's exercise

The task that day was to write, with the aid of a dictionary, an interesting word to describe Guy Fawke's night using each letter in the word fireworks as the initial letter. The teacher had gathered suggestions from the class and two or three examples were written on the board. Deborah helped the children organise their work with each letter of the word fireworks written in the margin, one under the other. Several children were unsure of how to spell fireworks and even more unsure of how to spell excited (*icsited – one boy's attempt and written against the 'i'*). Confusion over initial letter sounds made it difficult for him look up correct spellings in a dictionary. However, the word 'frightened' linked to animals sparks off a discussion between three children.

The Firework's Exercise

Speaker	Speech
Girl	Rabbit
Boy 1	Rabbit..yes..because rabbits are frightened of rockets
Boy 2	Rabbit, *(laughing)*... I got a rabbit
Girl	I don't like fireworks
Boy 2	I know we puts it inside..inside the garage
Boy 1	Do you know what my rabbit does? What it does when there's fireworks?
Girl	*(inviting a reply)* What?
Boy 1	It does the funniest jump in the world. It jumps normally and then it's legs go like that *(demonstrating with his hands)* all out to the side that way – she changes direction like that and her legs go that way – that's what she would do when she jumps, r rabbit r.
Girl	I know, you could put rabbit down. *(Under r in their books)*
Boy 1	Rabbit, the incredible rabbit
Deborah	I suppose you can put rabbit down if you want to..if you think your rabbit is going to be scared of the fireworks. *(Deborah has been helping other children with spellings, but cues in to what these three children are saying.)*

There followed some discussion about how to spell 'rabbit' and how old the children's rabbits were. At the end of the session the teacher is somewhat surprised at the suggestion of rabbit as a word to describe Guy Fawke's night, *"I don't know how rabbit fits in, but it begins with 'r'"* – acknowledging contribution.

Deborah, unlike Karen in the three little pigs episode, had made herself available to help children look up words in the dictionary and suggest words (often using letter sounds rather than letter names – excited begins with an 'e' sound, not an 'i' sound). She did not appear to be under pressure to make sure every child in the group completed the assignment. The discussion about the rabbit could be seen as an example of children 'metaphorically' linking two events (the rabbit's fear as a metaphor for the children's fear) (Heath 1983) but unless the children had the opportunity to point this out to the teacher she would be unaware of the

relevance the children saw in the situation. Deborah does understand the children's link as indicated by her remark, *"if you think your rabbit's going to be scared of fireworks'.* (sic)

Sonya with Craig and Tom

Sonya has been in post for eight months having previously worked as a parent helper. She took over some of the work formally done by Deborah who was re-deployed to support the Additional Learning Support sessions. Initially when I transcribed the tape I decided not to use it, partly on the grounds of length but also because I missed a lot of strategies that Sonya was using. Much of the other material that I had gathered, and my own professional approach to teaching language and literacy, failed to alert me to 'ways of taking' and 'coming to know' that are illustrated by this transcript. I am including a copy in *Appendix H*, together with a copy of the worksheet Tom and Craig were using. Sonya works with the boys, whom she describes as 'little monkeys', once a week. She uses a series of worksheets that link handwriting and spelling. There is a sense of rivalry and banter between the boys and the way Sonya deals with this is more reminiscent of 'friendly conversation' than 'structured teaching': the bridge between home and school. The session starts briskly enough with writing the date and testing the spellings from last week but then becomes more leisurely. Sonya offers reminders about previous learning and recalls that Tom thought of 'rattlesnake' in connection with the spelling of rattle. Sonya provides a mixture of direct teaching, reminders to 'get things right', as illustrated by the following quote from the transcript regarding Craig's handwriting:

> Well, if you can't work it out, then other people aren't going to be able to work it out, are they? Do it nice and slowly.

Sonya is sensitive to the boys' feelings of inadequacy over their level of literacy. It gradually emerges during the lesson that in addition to teaching about punctuation and word meanings, from the experiences Sonya has provided, the boys 'come to know':

- that there are several ways of spelling the long 'a' sound; exclaim/way/sleigh/bake,

- that the same word can have different meanings: march/March, May (name or month)/may; gay (homosexual or happy), and
- that words which sound the same can be spelt differently as well as have different meanings, slay/sleigh

The above examples are not made explicit. Sonya does not demonstrate that 'ay' usually comes at the ends of words unless followed by a suffix but the boys, through their generation of rhymes, are gradually building up an implicit knowledge of the structure of the English language. The are also making explicit some of their own increasing knowledge, as indicated by their references to 'kicking k' and no 'k' at the end of attic.

Unobserved tape recordings

I am only going to refer in any detail to one set of unobserved tape recordings made by assistants. Those made by the assistants when working with Additional Learning Support groups did not add anything significant to that already reported. The tapes assistants made when hearing a child read or working with a spelling group did not contain sufficient context for me to tease out similarities and differences and comment on them in relation to the literature reviewed in chapter 2 or my research questions in any depth. The tapes I have selected are of Liz working with three different year groups on a science assignment, YR, Y1 and Y3/4. The task had been selected by the teacher but was planned and executed by Liz.

The basic task of trying out different materials to decide which will float best under the circumstances was the same with each of the three groups, but as the children get older, the task and/or the written record of the task was made harder to show progression. The YR children, some of whom are not yet five, were gathered round the water tray. Liz had been given a carte blanche by the teachers to set up the activity, as she thought fit. She begins:

> I'm going to tell you a story. Once upon a time there was a group of pirates *(there's an interjection from two children, 'Oh no' and 'I don't*

like pirates' which is ignored) and they had a lovely boat and one day there was a terrible, terrible storm and the waves came crashing over ..and..what do you think the waves did to the boat?

(Chorus of 'crashed')

The waves plunged the boat down to the bottom. The pirates managed to escape onto a desert island where they decided to build a raft? Does anybody know what a raft is?

Zoe A raft is when you get some sticks and there's no inside.

Liz then explains that, in order to make a raft, and escape from the island they are going to try out some materials, tissue paper, kitchen towel, paper and cardboard. The children are adamant that the cardboard is going to be the best material, but Liz has her agenda and wants to try each material in turn. The children become a bit unruly. In the end they get round to the cardboard which, as the children predicted, stands up to supporting the pirates and dealing with the waves. Discussing the tape with me later, Liz says:

> I realised when I listened to it before passing it on, where I had gone wrong. I should have paid attention to the children's suggestions, tried the cardboard first. We could then have seen if any of the other materials could beat the cardboard.

A second session with Y1 was set up in a similar way. In order to record which material had performed best Liz had made a chart listing the 4 materials, first, second, third and fourth. Each child made a prediction and it was written up on the chart. Robert thought the cardboard would be best. However, Peter, Adam and Lily think differently as the following excerpt shows:

Speaker	Speech
Billy	Kitchen towel
Lily	It might float
Robert	No, it will sink
Peter	Is it Bounty kitchen towel?
Adam	Yes, Bounty, Bounty will float
	There is a lot of chatter and laughter as each material is tried in turn, starting with the kitchen towel.
Adam	It's thicker, thicker than paper so it might float.
Peter	It's got air in it, with air it floats.
Liz	Adam thinks it's going to float... watch carefully.
Peter	It's going damp
Robert	It's getting wet
Liz	Yes, it's getting wet
Peter	It's going all soggy – it's going to drown
Liz	Well, it doesn't drown, men drown – what happens to boats?
Lily	It goes right down to the bottom – it sinks
Peter	It (the water) went straight inside it (the kitchen towel)
Liz	It (the kitchen towel) absorbed it (the water)

When discussing the second tape, Liz remarked, *"It's the power of advertising, Bounty's been on the Tele for days now!"* Liz was aware of influences outside school on the children's development and the misconceptions that could arise in children's minds – the TV advertisement extolling the thickness and absorbency of Bounty kitchen towel being connected in some of the children's minds with it being able to float. During the session Liz used the concrete experience of watching what happened to various materials to guide the children towards both concept development and language development. Lily offered 'sink' instead of drown and Liz provided 'absorbed' when the kitchen towel became all 'soggy'. The influence of cultural, social and technological society and the multiplicity of literacies referred to by Barton & Hamilton (1998) are apparent as the children bring their knowledge of a TV advertisement into their exploration of the properties of materials in school.

The third taped episode with the Y3/4 group is introduced differently. Liz starts off by saying, *"I've got a selection of materials for you to choose from to make boats or rafts for pirates, whose boat has been sunk in a storm, leaving them marooned on an island"*. There is a lot of discussion between the children. Liz's voice is hardly heard. The children will write up their own predictions and findings. The girls and boys separate into two groups of three. The boys dominated the group and the water tray and Liz has to intervene to ensure fairness. Much of what was said was unclear, but it became obvious after a few minutes that the paper articles have been dismissed by the children as useless. Anticipating this, from these older children, Liz presented them with sandpaper, foil, cork and bubble wrap which all present a greater challenge. There is a lot of talk between the boys about first and second tests:

Boy 1 Put it in the water for the first test then...the second test

Boy 2 Push it down to see if it will float back up

Boy 3 No, no put a pirate on – we need to time them

Boy 1 30 seconds, yes let's see if it will last 30 seconds

There was an atmosphere of collaborative learning. The girls are more hesitant. Liz ensured that they had their turn.

As the session ended the children talked about the sinking of the Titanic which several have watched on video. In discussing the final tape Liz talked about the importance of children learning to work together – not something they always do well. Her remarks reflect the social world of children's learning explored by Pollard & Filer (1996) and how teachers (and assistants) 'scaffold' children's learning not only in the academic sense but also in supporting the coping strategies children need to become part of the school environment.

Conclusion

One of the most difficult decisions to be made when reviewing all the audio-taped material collected was which to include for analysis in order to offer a fair representation of the range and diversity and to acknowledge the opportunistic nature of any such data. The quality of the tape recordings played a part in the selection, for where speech was unclear it would have been easy to make

unreliable assumptions. In the end I have tried to represent the impression gained from the three different schools and the range of continuities and discontinuities across and within them in order to examine these in relation to my research questions. The support assistants were observed offering was wide and varied and they used 'intuitive' practices in supporting children's oral work, e.g. Karen and the tadpoles. The context or the materials often had a significant impact on the nature of support, e.g the scripted nature of the Additional Learning Support materials. In other cases, because there was little monitoring or evaluation in the school regarding the work of assistants, the main resource on which they drew, was their own intuitive literacy practices, the ones they described using with their own children, e.g. Joyce reading stories rather than non-fiction texts to young children in school, just like she had done with her own children, because she did not think that young children would understand non-fiction texts.

The school catchment area seemed to reflect, in part, what the children were expected to know and be able to do. The schools represent two of the three communities described by Heath (1983). School A admits a wide spectrum of pupils, similar to those from both the Maintown and Roadville communities. In adapting resources and strategies the teachers and assistants were aware of the need to consider any vocabulary that might be unfamiliar to pupils. In school B the assumption is, both by the way the timetable was ordered on a subject specific basis, and the expectation that children would know and understand words like 'colt', that the community is more like Maintown, although this is not expressed in these terms.

The management styles and ethos of the schools differed in the approaches they adopted to planning the work assistants undertook. In school A, the lessons assistants delivered or supported were carefully planned. Concern for the learning needs of the children was at the forefront of the teacher' and the assistants' mind, as demonstrated by the care taken to identify any vocabulary which might be unfamiliar. Training for assistants was also planned with the

same thought that was given to the training needs of teachers, thereby confirming the assistants' status as part of a professional team. In school B assistants were not involved in any advance planning with the teachers or English co-ordinator in order to focus on the children's learning needs. Training for assistants in connection with school-focused work was not a priority as the head assumed that assistants worked in schools in the interim before returning to the higher status posts for which they had trained prior to raising a family. The assistants in school C were regarded, as far as inclusion in dedicated training courses were concerned, as part of the professional staff in the school. However, less attention was paid to planning their work in relation to the children's needs.

The National Literacy Strategy and the Additional Learning Support materials had an impact on the way assistants viewed the teaching of literacy in schools. Karen's concern that she was unable to record children's reading behaviours, a skill she learnt on her Specialist Teacher Assistant course, because of managing a group, indicated that other recording systems need to be considered.
Schools practices, whether implicit or explicit, in the way they organised and managed the delivery of the Additional Learning Support sessions meant that teachers could be unaware of how and what children are learning, and where opportunities to demonstrate learning in other contexts could be offered. They were also unaware of when assistants needed support to help them to teach the children, whether this was related to terminology, behaviour management or matching instruction to a pupil's developing needs.

There was also the difficulty of being a participant observer. Questions of ethics arose. If an assistant was having a problem with terminology, managing a group or supporting an activity, should one intervene? I made the decision to be as inconspicuous as possible, and only to respond to a direct question during observations.

Assistants such as Joyce and Sandra could be described as pro-active from the information provided in the semi-structured interviews. They sought the

knowledge about resources and strategies that they needed in order for them to carry out their roles and responsibilities competently. In the process they got a great deal of job satisfaction. Joyce sought training in order to improve her skills and knowledge and once she had gained her qualification worked closely with a member of the local authority literacy team to devise a support programme for KS1 pupils who were having difficulty in learning to read and write. Sandra identified courses which would help her support pupils with a range of special educational needs, read books and articles on how to support children and used the knowledge gained to build up resources and activities to support learning. However, in school B, the assistants had little opportunity to attend training courses or to demonstrate that skills they possessed could be used to support children's learning.

CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS, REVIEW AND EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

Introduction

Investigating any form of human interaction is a complex business and this study into the ways in which classroom assistants supported children's acquisition and development of language and literacy, has raised a number of issues. My research project confirmed that some concerns, as outlined in chapter 2, still existed although the role of the classroom assistant in supporting children's learning had taken on an even higher profile with the introduction of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and the Additional Learning Support Materials. (DfEE 1998/9).

This study did not set out to examine the effectiveness of an assistant's input into raising the standards of literacy with individuals or groups of pupils but to investigate what they did and how they did it. It also set out to look at the influence of their own language histories and personal practices and how these affected their practice when working with children. In addition the study looked at the ways in which school policies and practices, and any training assistants received, influenced their work with pupils or was reflected in any changes to their own beliefs and values about literacy.

The introduction of the National Literacy Strategy and the Additional Learning Support materials during the research period meant that assistants, as well as teachers, were required to introduce initiatives which did not necessarily accord with their own values and beliefs regarding the nature of language and literacy and how it should be taught. Mroz (2000) in discussing the discourse of the literacy hour reported:

> The findings suggest that the endorsement of interactive whole class teaching appears to have had little effect in providing opportunities for pupils to question and explore ideas to help them regulate their own thinking. (p.1).

Classroom assistants were now expected to carry out interactive teaching with small groups. This raised the question of whether they had the necessary knowledge and understanding and, if they did, whether diverting them to supporting skills based work, such as the Additional Learning Support materials, faced them with the same dilemma as that faced by teachers, i.e. How can an adult help children to explore ideas and regulate their thinking when managing a group of pupils with divergent needs?

In this chapter I summarise and then discuss my findings in relation to the research questions, drawing on the data gathered during the three phases of my research as well as the literature reviewed in chapter 2. I also review and evaluate the research process and discuss the implications for policy and practice in education.

The aims of the small-scale ethnographic study were to:

1. Investigate the ways and the contexts in which classroom assistants supported children engaged in language and literacy activities.
2. Explore how assistants' own language and literacy histories and personal practices affected, or were affected by, their work in schools.
3. To look at the ways in which the school policies and practices and any training assistants receive influenced their work with children.

Summary of main findings

1. The management style and ethos of the school had a significant effect on the way classroom assistants' roles and responsibilities were defined in relation to both the explicit and implicit policies and practices in a school. The issues raised included the fact that heads had very different perceptions as to what constituted a staff team. Whereas in some schools the team included everyone who contributed to teaching and learning, in other schools assistants were viewed more as ancillary

workers or volunteer helpers. This might be a result of recruitment procedures, as many assistants had been lunchtime supervisors or volunteers helpers before being appointed. (HMI 1992) These factors affected both the explicit and implicit policies and practices regarding the deployment and management of assistants, monitoring of their work and access to training. Assistants' involvement in and liaison with teachers about planning, reporting and recording procedures with regard to children's work varied across schools and within classes in the same school. Few assistants had up-to-date job descriptions that accurately set out the range and diversity of their work. This is not surprising given the mixture of permanent and temporary contracts and the need for schools to use assistants flexibly, as funding changed, in order to meet pupils' special educational needs or the introduction of government initiatives such as the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and associated programmes. The diversity of outside experience assistants brought to their roles in schools was not generally appreciated or used – a factor reported by HMI (1992) and even when specific skills were exploited by a school, these were unlikely to attract any financial reward. Consistency of approach across classes and key stages with regard to assistants' management of learning and behaviour varied within and across schools. The support and advice assistants were given regarding pupils' learning needs and how to address them varied. However, many assistants felt that, if asked, they could suggest ways in which their work could be made more useful and productive. Assistants supported a wide range of language and literacy activities in schools in a variety of contexts. During the course of my research their responsibilities were extended in order to support elements of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies.

2. Assistants were drawn from a wide age range and wide social, educational and employment backgrounds. These tended to be similar to, but not so diverse as those of found in the local community.
3. Assistants drew on their own language histories and personal practices in order to support children's learning. These practices generally reflected,

but were not quite so diverse as those of the local community.

4. Accredited training such as the Specialist Teacher Assistant Course increased assistants' confidence in their ability to support children's learning – a factor also reported by Swann & Loxley (1998). However these courses were generally only available to assistants working in KS1 who met the entry criteria.
5. A partnership approach in schools encouraged assistants to reflect on their practice and invest time in learning new skills and strategies.
6. The range of literacy activities and the variety of texts the assistants reported using with their children at home were wider than, and in some respects different from, those used with children at school.
7. Responses from the questionnaire and information gathered during interviews and observations emphasised the assistants' desire to promote children's learning and their pleasure in seeing a child succeed at a task which was previously beyond their reach. Many assistants expressed a desire to know more about 'how to bring a child on' indicating that they were aware of the 'zone of proximal development'. Assistants also thought it was important to be aware of factors outside school, such as difficult personal circumstances, as these often affected a child's work and behaviour in school. They were aware that they had a role in helping children adjust to the social and cultural aspects of school life.
8. The introduction of the National Literacy Strategy and associated materials increased pressure on assistants to manage and teach groups of pupils without adequate consideration being given to the change in their roles and responsibilities, the training needed for teachers in how best to use assistants and the training needs of the assistants so that they could meet the new demands.
9. Assistants drew on their own language histories and personal practices when supporting pupils often quoting strategies they had used with their own children in order to help children in school. There was complex interaction of intuitive practices combined with strategies assistants had acquired through working in school.

10. Assistants' awareness of school policies varied – even when a particular policy, most often the Special Educational Needs policy, referred specifically to their roles and responsibilities.

I will now discuss the findings with reference to my research questions and previous chapters, beginning with the management style and ethos of the school and then moving on to look at the role played by assistants' language and literacy histories and their personal practices in the classroom.

Although I had expected, from knowledge gained through my professional involvement in schools, that policies and practices with regard to the work of classroom assistants would vary from school to school in order to meet differing needs, these variations were much greater than I had anticipated. Recent educational initiatives (Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs, 1994, The National Literacy Strategy, 1998, The National Numeracy Strategy, 1999 and The Additional Learning Support Materials, 1999) have all led to an increase in the numbers of classroom assistants employed in British schools. The resulting change in role from that of ancillary helper to assistant teacher raised a number of issues regarding the deployment of classroom assistants (HMI 1992, Moyles, 1997, Lee and Mawson, 1998, and NUT 1998). While some schools, as reported in chapters 4 and 5, have developed explicit policies and practices with regard to the deployment of assistants which include clear lines of communication, access for assistants to appropriate training and their involvement in aspects of planning, reporting and recording, this type of partnership approach was by no means common. The implicit expectations with little time available for liaison between teachers and assistants, the lack of training opportunities in order for assistants to develop the conceptual framework needed to support children's learning and the lack of joint planning which would have enabled the assistants to have had a greater understanding of the teachers' intentions as reported by Moyles (1997) was still apparent. The lack of an accurate and up-to-date job descriptions meant that there was no benchmark against which to evaluate and monitor assistants' diverse roles and responsibilities. Although most of the assistants worked continuously in the same schools, in

some cases for many years, the part-time, temporary nature of many contracts prevented their needs and roles being considered on a long-term basis. Swann & Loxley (1998) also concluded that:

> ....there is a great deal of variability across schools in the roles, responsibilities and status of classroom assistants' (p.142), and that to date:
>
> .....national and local policy for the use of classroom assistants in primary schools has been characterised by a combination of unplanned drift, and attempts at innovation through training (p.157).

However, the responses to the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews and observations carried out showed that classroom assistants brought a range of personal practices, values and beliefs about language and literacy into schools. Although the limited range of contexts from which the information was gathered cannot be considered representative of more than very localised data it offered some insights into the ways in which assistants support the acquisition and development of language and literacy in mainstream primary schools.

In recent years a number of handbooks or training manuals targeted at classroom assistants have been produced (Clipson-Boyles, 1996, Fox, 1996, Challen & Majors, 1997, Balshaw 1991, 1999 and Fox & Halliwell, 2000). Many of these publications contain practical ideas and suggestions for assistants to use when supporting children. However, not all assistants have access to such resources and only the most recent (Fox & Halliwell, 2000) made any reference to the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and assistants' roles in supporting groups of children using the Additional Learning Support materials.

A number of assistants indicated, and were observed, drawing on the strategies they reported using with their own children to help pupils master skills and gain understanding from texts. This reinforced the view put forward by Weinberger (1995) that literacy interactions are often intuitive

and come from well-embedded home literacy practices. However, some assistants also related how they used skills and knowledge they had gained by working in schools and through undertaking training courses to mediate the practices they used at home, if not with their own children, then with their grandchildren. The incorporation into home practices of skills and knowledge learnt elsewhere suggested that these assistants do not see literacy as a static process. Many assistants, as reported in chapters 4 and 5, recalled learning to read with Janet and John or similar reading schemes and they remarked on the wider and more interesting choice of children's books available today, whether these were scheme or 'real' picture and story books. Most of the assistants reported that they enjoyed reading (given time) and read to their own children on a regular basis, the bedtime story being an established practice. They recalled with pleasure being read to when young. Many assistants' home literacy practices in my research reflected the Maintown ways reported by Heath (1988). Assistants' reports about their family literacy activities suggested a distinct gender bias in relation to home practices. The majority of girls and women read fiction and magazines, as well as literature associated with hobbies and the functional reading needed for everyday life, whereas, although some read widely, men and boys tended to read for information related to work, sport or hobbies.

Assistants reported working regularly with the same individuals or groups of children in school. They would often meet them in less formal situations too – out in the local community, and if the assistants also worked as lunchtime supervisors, on the playground. The less formal encounters afforded assistants opportunities to engage in what Wells (1987) describes as the "collaborative construction of meaning" (p.111) whether this is sorting out misconceptions regarding 'holding tadpoles' or supporting children's grasp of science concepts. Of course, not all assistants are 'tuned-in' to oracy and literacy needs of the pupils to the same extent. There was, as reported (Moyles, 1997) a tendency to concentrate on the mechanical product orientated aspects of a task. Many of the activities assistants reported undertaking with children were concerned with the basic skills of

phonics, letter formation, looking up words in a dictionary or thesaurus, completing worksheets or supporting pupils to enable them to complete the same activity as the rest of the class or group. A lot of the strategies and techniques for doing these tasks had been, as HMI (1992) reported, learnt on the job rather than having been acquired as a result of any tailored training. However, as the taped recording of Sonya working with Craig and Tom showed, although many 'teaching points' that occurred during the session were not picked up and there was an over-emphasis on letter sounds, in accordance with the policy of the school, which could have confused the boys, they were absorbing a number of points, for instance the dual meanings of words such as 'may'. In contrast, the literacy practices assistants reported using with their own children at home encompassed a much broader concept of literacy. In addition to reading to and with their own children at home and talking about a variety of texts, assistants mentioned using environmental print, picture and puzzle books, playing games, buying books, swapping books and visiting the library. Some mentioned activities similar to those reported by Heath (1988) in connection with Roadville practices: teaching the names of letters and colours and learning nursery rhymes. The strategies assistants adopted to support children in school varied substantially. The differences were most apparent when comparing similar, widely used phonic resources. In some cases assistants had tailored the work to the needs of the group or child, in others assistants concentrated on the completion of the worksheets and accurate record keeping.

During 1999/00 assistants in KS2 were deployed to support groups of children working with the Additional Learning Support materials. This again raised the issue of care and control (Woods, 1987) first raised by assistants when the National Literacy Strategy was introduced. I would suggest that the effect on assistants, and the adjustments they have to make, when new initiatives such as the National Literacy Strategy are introduced is underestimated. The major concern expressed by assistants in connection with the National Literacy Strategy, and even more particularly with the

Additional Learning Support materials, was the management of groups of children. Their ability to support the learning goals was not raised to the same extent and this issue may be of even more importance, especially where lack of liaison with the teachers means that assistants could assume that skills and strategies learnt with them will automatically be transferred to class work. The pace of the Additional Learning Support sessions also caused concern on two counts. Firstly, if children were away there was no opportunity to revisit elements such as grapheme/phoneme correspondences covered in the programme and secondly, for children whose grasp of certain skills was still quite tenuous, there was insufficient thinking time during the sessions to consolidate learning.

Evidence from observations, interviews, school documents and the questionnaire indicate that assistants were most frequently used to support the least able or those with behavioural problems. A small minority of assistants were specifically appointed to support children with physical or sensory difficulties but these do not form part of the current research.

Generally speaking assistants were not involved in testing and assessment of children's reading and writing skills in the formal sense. In some schools, however, they kept records of a child's progress in reading and spelling, noting when a child was ready to move up to the next level on a reading scheme or colour coded set of books, recording reading errors and giving spelling tests. The use made of such records varied widely. Some assistants reported that the records were discussed with the teacher, used to give feedback to the pupils and as a basis for further teaching. In other cases the assistants did not use the records themselves and did not know how, or if, the teacher used them.

Many assistants because they lived with their families in the local community were well placed to mediate between home and school literacy practices. They were aware of the children's current interests, whether these were related to sport, television or the latest 'must have' game. They were

observed in both formal and informal situations using this background knowledge to build on children's knowledge and understanding, without always picking up on children's misunderstandings and misconceptions. During the informal interactions in the classroom, assistants were observed engaging in more reciprocal conversations than during formal sessions when the need to ensure children completed a task took greater priority.

The head teachers and/or special educational needs co-ordinators interviewed in the three core schools all reported placing a high value on the contribution classroom assistants made in supporting children, teachers and the schools. However, the policies and practices they adopted differed quite considerably indicating that the 'high value' was not always translated into management and organisational strategies used in relation to classroom assistants.

Evaluation and review of the methodology and research process

The data upon which this small-scale research was based was drawn from four sources: a questionnaire survey, semi-structured interviews, observations and the collection of school policy documents from the three schools used in phase three. In addition, field notes were taken during visits to other schools and at conferences and in-service training sessions. Although these notes only played a minor part in the overall study they confirmed that the roles and responsibilities assistants were required to undertake in supporting pupils with special educational needs and national initiatives were widespread. I recognise that my own values and beliefs about the acquisition and development of language and literacy will have influenced the questions I asked and the selection of data for analysis.

An ethnographic methodology was adopted in order to gather data from a limited number of primary schools in order to draw out grounded themes about the work of classroom assistants. This approach was, by its very nature, subjective. By using progressive focusing I built on the knowledge and experience gained during the pilot phase of the project, which was

limited to just one school, as the basis for the questions posed in the survey and interviews. Although the survey questions were revised in light of colleagues comments these were drawn up from a professional and personal perspective and only addressed to one group of people – classroom assistants. Another researcher may have asked different questions or selected different examples of assistants' practices thereby generating alternative answers. The length of the questionnaire might have inhibited replies from a number of assistants, especially those who were less than confident about their own literacy skills. Only 47 out an estimated more than 200 assistants completed the questionnaire survey and these were from the 20/39 schools with which I was most closely associated. However, the information that was obtained from the observations and interviews in the eight schools during phase two indicated that the range of experiences reported by assistants completing the questionnaire reflected the range and diversity of practice. My criteria for selecting the schools for a more in-depth study during phase three was based on the results of the data gathered and analysed during phase two. That was, urban primary schools serving a range of different catchment areas and where the policies for deploying assistants, as stated by the head teacher, differed. The data cannot, however, be considered representative of classroom assistants in general as the high quality of many of the interactions between assistants and pupils reported suggests that the bias is towards the more literate assistants. Many assistants reflected on their practice in schools, were alert to opportunities to increase their knowledge and understanding and were likely to adopt school based practices that they saw as beneficial in promoting literacy with their own children. My research suggests that many assistants demonstrate a potential that may be under-used because teachers are unaware of particular talents or limitations. My findings also confirmed some of the conclusions from the surveys, observations and interviews carried out by other researchers. One significant difference, however, is that the information I have gathered through the questionnaire, observations and semi-structured interviews comes almost exclusively from classroom assistants, whereas the questionnaire surveys (Lee & Mawson, 1998 and NUT 1998) obtained

much of their data from head teachers and teachers as well as classroom assistants, and that done by Moyles (1997) concentrated on assistants in KS1. My data represents assistants' views about the contribution they made to children's learning, the rewards and frustrations of their jobs and the pressures and concerns they felt when their roles and responsibilities were changed without notice or preparation.

The study was, on reflection, too broad for one researcher. A shorter questionnaire and more time spent observing practices in the three core schools would have offered a more in-depth view of *what assistants did and how they did it.*

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

The findings in this report relate to a small-scale study, carried out by a lone researcher in a limited number of schools during a time of change for both teachers and classroom assistants. However, when considered in conjunction with the work of others, as detailed in chapter 2, the support assistants provide for children, teachers and schools, the following implications for education would appear worthy of consideration.

- When new national initiatives are introduced the training needs of classroom assistants need to be considered alongside those of teachers. For instance, the revised Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs, due to be introduced next year (DfEE 2000), is likely to have implications for the work of classroom assistants as these women offer a high level of support to pupils with a range of physical, sensory, learning and behavioural needs.
- In order to monitor and evaluate the work of assistants they need to have job descriptions that clearly define their roles and responsibilities, pay and conditions and line management.
- Temporary contracts of employment cause lack of commitment on the part of schools to investing in induction and training programmes and do not encourage assistants to be pro-active in seeking the necessary

knowledge and skills to enable them to support the children, the teachers or the school.

- Schools need to carry out an audit of the skills and abilities, knowledge of the local community and professional backgrounds and aspirations of assistants in their schools in order to match these to the duties and responsibilities they expect assistants to fulfil. A similar recommendation was made by Moyles (1997) and has become even more necessary given the increased role assistants are expected to play in teaching children.
- A recognised, national, induction programme and career structure which rewards particular skills and additional, accredited training needs to be developed and adopted.
- The teaching staff need to be aware of *how* assistants work with children as well as *what* they do in order to build on the skills and strategies they have developed to enable assistants to 'bring a child on'. Teachers also need to be aware of the time pressures on assistants as these can reduce opportunities for collaborative and reciprocal learning.
- Although this research has not looked at the needs of ethnic minority groups the particular home literacy histories and personal practices of these pupils need to be taken into account when considering the recruitment and deployment of assistants.
- Assistants found it easier to take on board the changes needed by national initiatives in schools where there were clear lines of communication and line management.
- This study did not include assistants working in rural schools but these also need to be considered.

Conclusion

The dedication and commitment assistants offer to schools and the children and teachers in them were reflected not only in the results of my research but in previous research that has been carried out into their roles and responsibilities. Although there is a view that the assistants' skills ought to be used to support the more mundane and mechanical aspects of children's

learning, my research suggests that, if they are included as part of the professional staff team, many are able to offer more than this. The majority of assistants had already shown their commitment to children before being appointed as they had worked in schools as lunchtime supervisors or volunteer helpers. These routes into employment as classroom assistants offered advantages to the schools as the head teachers had already had the opportunity to assess an applicant's suitability. However, schools should be wary of supposing that an assistant's prior knowledge of the school upon appointment is sufficient to enable them to make a full contribution to the children and the teachers without a planned induction programme followed by appropriate training. The change in role from ancillary worker to assistant teacher, and the new demands this change placed upon both teachers and classroom assistants may not yet have been fully realised. Although at the beginning of the research project I started out with the idea of looking at written language policies and how these translated into practice in the classroom other factors were more significant. These included issues of communication, teacher/assistant liaison in order to plan and review work, use of the skills and knowledge assistants brought to the role, tailored training programmes and the working conditions assistants experienced in relation to the management styles and ethos of the schools.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A - Questionnaire to classroom assistants

I am carrying out a research project into the ways in which classroom assistants support children's acquisition and development of language and literacy in primary schools. I would be grateful if you would answer the following questions to help me with my research. All replies will be treated in the strictest confidence. If, however, you feel you can contribute more information than this questionnaire allows you to provide, or if you wish to discuss any points, please do not hesitate to contact me.

What is the main focus of your work in school?

a). Supporting individual pupils ☐

b). Supporting groups of children ☐

c). Working with a teacher/teachers as the need arises. ☐

In which of the following areas do you support pupils? (Please tick all that apply)

i. Helping develop their spoken language.

ii. Helping pupils develop their reading ☐

iii. Helping pupils develop their written language ☐

iv. Helping pupils develop mathematical skills ☐

v. Helping pupils develop scientific skills ☐

vi. Helping pupils concentrate on set tasks ☐

vii. Ensuring pupils behave appropriately ☐

viii. Supporting pupils with physical needs ☐

ix. Supporting pupils with sensory needs ☐

x. Supporting children with English as an additional language ☐

xi. Other (please give brief details of any other support you offer pupils) ☐

xii. Helping pupils in other areas of the curriculum please state which.....

I spend most of the time when I am working with children supporting

.....

I would be grateful for replies to as many questions as possible. However, if you feel any particular question and/or questions are intrusive or impertinent, please ignore them. The completion of the questionnaire is entirely voluntary. All replies will be treated in the strictest confidence. Anonymity will be preserved.

Please describe the kinds of things you do to support the following (you may find it helpful to jot down the activities you undertake during the course of a week):

1). The development of speaking and listening skills. [2] (Please state alongside each activity the National Curriculum Year Group of the pupils supported).

2). The acquisition and development of reading. (Please state alongside each activity the National Curriculum Year Group of the pupils supported).

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[2] Please indicate whether the support you give in this area is for children whose first language is English (MT) or for children who are acquiring English as an additional language (EAL).

3). The acquisition and development of written language. (Please state alongside each activity the National Curriculum Year Group of the pupils supported).

4). What information are you given about the needs of the pupils you are asked to work with?

.....

.....

.....

5). Is there any further information about pupils' needs that you would find helpful?

.....

.....

.....

6). What information are you given about how the activities you undertake with children are intended to support learning?

.....

.....

.....

.....

7). How/where do you record observations on what pupils can do?

.....

.....

8). To whom do you report these observations?

.....

.....

9). How do the observations you make affect further work with pupils?

.....

.....

10). Please describe any joint planning you engage in with the teacher, e.g. written, discussion, long term, short term.

.....

.....

.....

11a). What do you find most rewarding about working in school?

.....

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11b). Is there anything about your work which is frustrating?

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.....

.....

12). Can you think of any ways in which your work could be made more useful or productive?

.....

.....

.....

13). Please complete the following regarding training received since beginning work in school. (This could include inclusion in staff meetings, courses run in school in relation to Government initiatives and short or long courses which may or may not carry a qualification).

Date	Details of training	Venue	Funded by

.....

.....

.....

.....

14). Are there any areas in which you would like training? (Please list in order of priority).

.....

.....

15). What contribution do you feel you could make to the implementation of school policies, especially basic ones such as reading, writing, spelling, handwriting, number work and recording?

.....

.....

The following questions relate to you personally. [3]

16). Your age, please underline the correct one.

(25 – 35 years) (36 – 45 years) (46 – 55 years) (56 – 65 years)

17). How long have you worked as a classroom assistant? _____years_____months

18). How long have you been in your current post? _____years_____months

19). What attracted you to working as a classroom assistant?

.....

.....

20). How many hours per week do you work as a classroom assistant? _____hours

21). What type of contract do you have? Please underline the correct one.

Permanent Temporary A mixture of permanent & temporary

22). How old were you when you left full time education? _____years_____months

23). Please list any formal qualifications you hold, e.g. GCSE/A levels/Diploma/Degree

.....

24). Please list any employment before taking up work as a classroom assistant.

.....

.....

The next section refers to your personal reading and writing

25a). What kinds of reading and writing activities can you remember from your childhood.

Were you read to as a child? If yes, by whom? .....

.....

25b). What do you remember about the experience of being read to? .....

.....

.....

.....

25c). What do you recall of learning to read and write?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

What kinds of reading and writing do you remember doing when you were at school? (You may find it easier to think of these in terms of primary and secondary school).

26a). at school .....

.....

.....

.....

26b). at home .....

.....

.....

[3] Although I would be grateful for an answer to each question, please do not feel obliged to answer any you consider

27). What kinds of reading do you remember doing for pleasure as a child? (Did you have favourite authors/types of book/comics/non-fiction?)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

28). Do you, or did you read to your own children? If yes, please describe where, when and the types of material read.

.....

.....

.....

29) Please describe any other ways used to introduce your children to books?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

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.....

unreasonable or impertinent.

Please list the reading and writing activities you undertake in connection with your work in schools.

30a). Done at school

.....

.....

.....

30b). Done at home to prepare for tasks in school.

.....

.....

.....

31). Please list the reading and writing activities you undertake in connection with your home life. (You may like to keep a record over a week or so). [4]

.....

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.....

32). How would you describe yourself and member of your family with regard to reading? (e.g. an avid reading of fiction, an avid reading of non-fiction; an occasional reader of fiction, an occasional reader of non-fiction; rarely read fiction; rarely read non-fiction; the majority of reading undertaken relates to work; the majority of reading undertaken relates to leisure activities)

.....

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.....

Please return to:

Mrs. I. Mersh

Thank you very much for taking the time and trouble to complete the questionnaire which will be of great use in the research project I am undertaking.

---

[4] A list is attached as a reminder of the many literacy activities adults may undertake jin connection with running a home.

APPENDIX A - Questionnaire to Classroom Assistants – Quantitative Data

I am carrying out a research project into the ways in which classroom assistants support children's acquisition and development of language and literacy in primary schools. I would be grateful if you would answer the following questions to help me with my research. All replies will be treated in the strictest confidence. If, however, you feel you can contribute more information than this questionnaire allows you to provide, or if you wish to discuss any points, please do not hesitate to contact me.

What is the main focus of your work in school?

a). Supporting individual pupils 26

b). Supporting groups of children 39

c). Working with a teacher/teachers as the need arises. 13

In which of the following areas do you support pupils? (Please tick all that apply)

i. Helping whose native language is English to develop their spoken language. 39

ii. Helping pupils develop their reading 45

iii. Helping pupils develop their written language 43

iv. Helping pupils develop mathematical skills 27

v. Helping pupils develop scientific skills 14

vi. Helping pupils concentrate on set tasks 47

vii. Ensuring pupils behave appropriately 39

viii. Supporting pupils with physical needs 12

ix. Supporting pupils with sensory needs 5

x. Supporting children with English as an additional language 7

xi. Other (please give brief details of any other support you offer pupils)

xii. Helping pupils in other areas of the curriculum. (Please state which) IT, Art , history and geography were mentioned and 'all areas'

I spend most of the time when I am working with children helping them to: ***Most replies stated reading and writing and understanding what they need to do.***

Appendix B – Questionnaire for Classroom Assistants

Reminder list of possible literacy activities undertaken by your family

Reading & Writing Activities related to:

gardening	41/47
cooking	47/47
making clothes	13/47
knitting	33/47
current affairs	45/47
health	47/47
dealing with bills and bank accounts	47/47
using the telephone	47/47
diary dates (e.g. birthdays, outings, appointments)	47/47
house repairs	47/47
maintenance of household equipment	39/47
purchasing goods	47/47
religion	13/47
T.V.	47/47
games (board games, card games, etc.)	32/47
sport	47/47
timetables	14/37
holidays	47/47
shopping	47/47
ordering from catalogues	16/47
ordering from the internet	0/47
map-reading	32/47
using household technology (video recorders, alarm clocks, etc).	47/47
maintaining cars and bicycles	9/47
reading magazines	47/47
household insurance	47/47
car insurance	46/47
reading comics	18/47
reading information books (encyclopaedias, dictionaries)	47/47
reading novels	45/47
writing letters	47/47
writing instructions	8/47
writing fiction (poetry, short stories)	4/47
keeping a diary	16/47

other – please specify: only two replies – one wrote 'filling in questionnaires' and the other 'leaving messages for husband and children'.

APPENDIX C
Classroom Assistant Semi-Structured Interview Questions

I explained to each assistant, prior to interviews and observations, that I was interested in the work they did in schools both because of my job and the research I was doing. I gave a brief outline of the areas I would cover: work in school; training in connection with the job; the reading and writing they did at home; their memories of reading and writing in school and the kinds to reading and writing activities they did with their own children. I thanked them for their time.

I asked the assistants' permission to record the interviews and observations and to make accompanying notes.

The items listed are prompts to ensure the same things are covered with each assistant. Exact wording will be modified in light of earlier answers.

<u>Session 1</u> – Background and context of assistant's work in school

1. How long have you worked as a classroom assistant?

2. How long have you been in your current post?
Supplementary question about other posts if appropriate.

3. Have you been involved in any other way with the school?

4. How many hours per week do you work as an assistant?

5. Is your contract permanent, temporary or a mixture of both?

6. Do you have a job description?

7. Which year groups do you support?

Tell me about your work in school. What does your job involve?

How would you describe a typical week?

Session Two: Working with pupils and teachers

The questions in this section focused on the assistant's work with children. (I also asked for clarification or expansion of any queries from the previous session)

Tell me about the kind of information you are given regarding the pupils you work with.

Are there other things you may find it helpful to know?

Tell me about how the activities you do help children' learning. What do you do to help with the reading of different kinds of text? How do you help children with writing tasks? *This may be related to an activity observed and will also ask about the source of information about the intended learning, e.g. programme guide such as P.A.T. or ALS materials.*

Please tell me about or show me any records you keep

How are the records used? *Liaison with teacher to plan further work; shared with children to promote learning goals; shared with parents, for instance a reading record which goes home so that parents can comment on their child's reading; used with outside agencies, i.e .to provide evidence for a statement of special educational needs*

Tell me about any planning you are involved in. *Contributing to Individual Education Plans (IEPs.*

Tell me about the most rewarding aspects of your work.

How about frustrations?

Can you think of any ways in which your work could be made more useful or productive? *Time-tabling; school policies; feedback; liaison; recording*

Tell me about any training you've had or would like.

Tell me about any preparation you do, a). in school b). at home to help children learn.

Session Three: **Literacy history and personal practices**

First clarify any points from the previous sessions.

Tell me about the kind of reading and writing activities you can remember from your childhood, e.g.

Being read to and by whom.

What do you recall of the experience?

Tell me about learning to read and write

Tell me about the kinds of reading and writing you did at home and school when you were young. *Primary school, secondary school, leisure reading.*

What kinds of things did you enjoy? *Favourite types of reading material, authors.*

Tell me about any reading or writing activities you didn't like? *Ask why*

Tell me about the kinds of things you have done at home with your own children. *Types of books; age of child when you introduced them to books; other activities*

Have other members of the family or friends been involved with the above?

Tell me about the kinds of reading and writing other members of your family do/have done. *(husbands, parents, grandparents, children and any other relatives)*

Tell me about your own reading and writing outside school work. *Running a home and family, leisure reading, communicating with friends, hobbies, societies.*

Specific areas to look for or ask about in the interviews and observations as a result of questionnaire survey responses.

- Do practices differ between classroom assistants working in KS1 and KS2?
- Does the length of time an assistant has been in post affect the ways in which they work, perhaps by appropriating the school (or what they perceive to be) the school discourse?
- What influence does the assistant's educational background have on the ways in which they work? Is a librarian or secretary more likely to have 'mainstream' ways of taking than a shop assistant?
- How does the training affect their practice? Is this influenced by the use the school make of them following training by encouraging use of learning? Do assistants put the strategies learned into practice without explicit support from school?
- How does their status in school affect their contribution to language and literacy learning?
- How does the context in which the assistant is working with a child or children affect what she does? Formal/informal situations, for instance, early morning routine in a KS1 classroom v. supporting a literacy activity in that classroom? Following a prescribed programme PAT/ALS?
- The location of 'meaning' in responding to children's oral reading. How do assistants help children understand texts?
- Mediating instructions from the teacher.
- The 'scaffolding' (or otherwise) of learning. Active/passive. Learning styles of the children
- *Continuities and discontinuities across settings*
- The relationship between language and literacy practices observed/or reported and the school policies:
- Conserve own practices or make conscious changes based on their work in schools and any training
- Variation in number of hours worked – relate to contracts
- How does an assistant translate the information on a child's statement into support for that child?
- What types of things are written in liaison books?
- What kind of observations do the assistants make? Are these related to behaviour or learning? To one child or a group of children and a child's position in that group?
- What is meant by certain statements, e.g. self-evident?
- What is meant by 'teachers take action accordingly'?

Appendix C - Classroom Assistant Observation Form

School	NCY	No. of pupils
Observation time	In class/withdrawal	Date
Context		
Activity		
Prompts – Look for: Type of language used Questions asked Modification of lessons Reading strategies encouraged Prompts given for writing Behaviour management Children's responses		

APPENDIX D

School Visit Notes: Discussion with Classroom Assistants at Copse End Primary School – 10th March 1999

The school employs 6 assistants. Duties vary according to whether they are employed as general assistants or to support individual pupils with statements of special educational needs. The introduction of the National Literacy Strategy necessitated some changes in working practices. Assistants continued to implement speech and language programmes, run phonological awareness training sessions using P.A.T. and to manage groups working on the DISTAR programme, help children in the curriculum areas, particularly English, maths and science.

Issues raised included:

- Training needs in connection with the literacy hour. Assistants found the recent Local Education Authority training session very helpful and felt it highlighted the fact that assistants need to be present during the 30 minute input on text and word level work in order to support pupils during the group/individual 20 minute session. Assistants would like guidance on how best to use this time whilst still giving attention to the teacher's input. The following possibilities were discussed:

- *Preparing materials/mounting work*
- *Observing individual/groups of pupils, noting attention span, response to questions, behaviour in order to report any perceived difficulties to the teacher. However, it was generally felt that the teachers had eyes everywhere and were very aware of what was going on.*
- *Noting statements, instructions, information from the teacher which they felt would need to be simplified for pupils with special educational needs. Assistants felt that sometimes their efforts to explain a concept or process more simply confused the children still further and they would like guidance on the best ways of representing information so that children whose comprehension of spoken language was weak could understand.*

- Group/Individual work: Assistants employed to support individual pupils often supported that pupil within a group situation during the

literacy hour. They also acted as policemen/aides to ensure that the teacher could work intensively on the guided group each day. Issues raised included:

- *How much help should an assistant give a pupil? This applied whether they were working with a group of whether they were helping with spellings, comprehension questions or as they monitored groups in the class and when children raised their hands.*
- *There was some confusion as to why the teacher needed to work with one group rather than monitor the work of the whole class. Assistants who were used to hearing individual pupils read wondered why the guided reading/writing groups were better – a training issue in connection with the strategy which was partly addressed at the recent LEA session.*
- *How do you bring a child on? They can do so much, what do you do, how do you explain things to help them aster the next step? Assistants stated that the often used strategies they had found helped their own children but would like further guidance.*
- *When an assistant is employed for a particular pupil, how much should they allow themselves to be distracted from that child's needs so that they could help other pupils in the group? All children in the group need some help but they felt they must target the specific pupil.*
- *Assistants would like help on how to give instructions, keep a group on task, ways of teaching phonics/spellings, retrieving information from a book, developing prediction skills (one or two said they were picking this up from watching the teachers) using open ended questions, ensuring children have read and understood questions, explaining, feedback on whether they were using the right language (terminology), helping children to develop automaticity (my word their concept) breaking literacy learning down into manageable steps for pupils with special needs.*

- General Issues:
  - Assistants found having a copy of the teacher's planning for the literacy hour very helpful

- Assistants were aware of the National Literacy Strategy Framework for Teaching but found the prospect of reading it all quite daunting, but would welcome an overview of the expectations each term – this might help them note which elements children are learning/struggling with. It was felt that it was easy to keep up with what the children were doing in the Infants but more information was needed in the Juniors.
- Record keeping – assistants felt they could always talk to teachers but there did not seem to be a formal way of keeping records and limited time for informal feedback.
- Tackling inappropriate behaviour, especially when working with a group outside the classroom. (*This issue was raised but many assistants at the recent training sessions)* There was some concern about their status with the pupils – not being the teacher.
- Training for assistants, career structure, qualifications that would help address issues raised which included philosophies on how children learn were raised.

- Job descriptions – the assistants felt these needed updating in view of the changed roles since the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy.
  - Now that assistants are not doing so much 1-1 work with children they would appreciate help on group management
  - Assistants would have liked National Literacy Strategy training before implementation and wondered what would happen when the numeracy strategy was introduced.
  - Assistants raised the question of a balanced curriculum: children were tired after so much intense work, especially when literacy and numeracy take up most of the morning. What about opportunities for learning social skills? A lot of verbal interaction goes on during art, design and technology that provides opportunities for children to share and be guided on how to behave.

    Assistants were unfamiliar with the specific terminology used in the National Literacy Strategy even though they knew from experience what to do. They found the glossary handed out at the inservice training session useful but would like to discuss some words.

Year 3
Term 2 Week 2
Whole Class Focused Word and Sentence Work
Approximately 15 minutes

APPENDIX E

Learning objectives:

2. ***the function of adjectives within sentences, through:***
   - ***identifying adjectives in shared reading;***
   - ***discussing and defining what they have in common, i.e. words which qualify nouns;***
6. ***to use independent spelling strategies;***
8. ***how words change when -er, -est and -y are added;***
18. ***to infer the meaning of unknown words from context and generate a range of possible meanings, e.g. for the word 'ochre' in a particular sentence, discuss which is the most likely meaning and why;***

Learn to spell: bigger, tallest, slowest, kinder, thirsty, sleepy

Monday Make a list of words or phrases that describe a range of stories, e.g. magical, happy, funny, scary, familiar, fair, noisy, etc. Ask the children to name this type of word, i.e. adjectives. Note that all these adjectives tell us more about the noun. Choose some adjectives to add -er, -est and -y to. Ask the children to say how the words change, e.g. adding -er to a one or two syllable adjective forms the 'comparative' – colder, bigger, etc; adding -est forms the 'superlative' – coldest, biggest etc; adding -y can make nouns become adjectives, e.g. smiley, thirsty, etc. It is not necessary for children to learn these terms, they simply need to understand, that adding suffixes to words can change their meaning.

Tuesday Ask the children to identify the adjectives in the shared text. If you selected 'The Hare and the Tortoise', children will find it difficult to find any – ask them why this might be, e.g. because the stories are part of the oral tradition, the actions are more important than the attributes, etc. Experiment by adding adjectives, e.g. cruel hare, determined tortoise, etc. Assess the impact of these additions on the text.

Wednesday Map the events of the story shared. Look at the different types of words used, e.g. mostly nouns and verbs. Are there any adjectives? If yes, consider why it was important to use them in these instances. If not, consider why they were unnecessary. Make a comparison of the two stories.

Thursday Develop lists of alternative words, some of those identified in the list of common themes, e.g. substitutes for good, evil, weak, strong, wise, foolish, etc. Consider what type of words they are, e.g. could be adjective when used to qualify nouns. These lists should be established today and added to over time. They will be particularly useful next week when the children will be writing character sketches.

Friday Edit and improve the story until it has the desired impact on the reader.

Year 3
Term 2 Week 1
Teacher's Notes to Support Group Work

In Terms 2 and 3 of Year 3, the focus of Guided Reading and Writing moves from reading strategies to consolidating and extending the text objectives from Shared Text Work. For some less able readers, teachers will need to continue teaching the strategies identified for Term 1, i.e. reading on, leaving a gap and returning to try again, using knowledge of phonemes to build words, applying word recognition and graphic knowledge, using contextual clues, etc.

TASK 1 (ability group)
Guided Reading and Writing

Purpose of task:
To experience guided reading and writing in a small ability group working with the teacher for half the session. Focusing on story openings.

Task:
To read silently a traditional story provided by the teacher, to discuss the story opening with other members of the group and the teacher, to continue reading and to make notes about the story once the teacher moves to Group 2. An optional Task Sheet is included.

TASK 2 (ability group)
Guided Reading and Writing

Purpose of task:
To select a text, to read and understand it, to summarise the plot for others and to express a personal opinion about the text.

Task:
Children select from a range of traditional stories provided by the teacher, they read the story and when the teacher joins the group, summarise it, stating what they liked or disliked about it.

NOTE: No Task Sheet is required for this activity.

TASK 3

Purpose of task:
To concentrate on listening to a story, afterwards identifying the key features of the story and recording ideas using a writing frame.

Task:
To listen to a story tape and then to complete Task Sheet 3.

TASK 4

Purpose of task:
To encourage children to notice and then mimic the particular style of the sentences on the Task Sheet.

Task:
To create sentences that are similar in style to the examples given in Task Sheet 4.

TASK 5

Purpose of task:
To practise handwriting and spelling and to collect, classify and investigate similar words.

Task:
To copy sentences that include this week's spellings and then to collect, classify and investigate similar words.

Year 3 Term 2 Week 1
Task Sheet 1

Name:

Guided Reading

Story Title:

Characters in the Story:

The Subject of the Story (what it is about):

Important Words and Phrases from the Story:

Year 3 Term 2 Week 1
Task Sheet 3

Name:

Listening to a Story

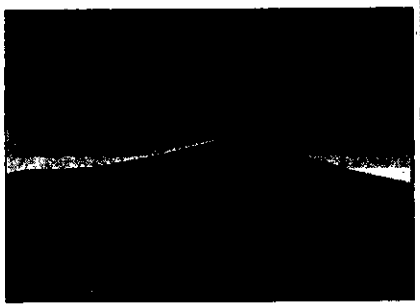
The story on the tape is called...

The characters in the story are...

The story starts...

And then...

In the end...



Year 3 Term 2 Week 1
Task Sheet 4

Name:

Copying Style

Read these two sentences carefully. The ideas are different, but they are written in the same style.

1. In the beginning there was no water on Earth, and the world was dry.

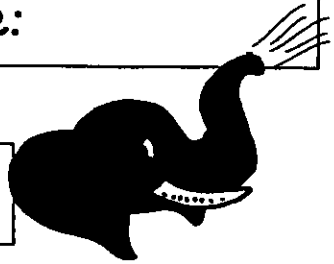
2. In the beginning there were no trees on Earth, and the world was bare.

Write two sentences using your own ideas but copying the style of the sentences above. You could write about the sun, moon, stars, animals, people or use an idea of your own.

Once you have written two sentences in this style, make a collection of story openings and endings. For example, 'Now when ...' or 'Once upon a time...'.

Year 3 Term 2 Week 1
Task Sheet 5

Name:



Copy

Spelling and Handwriting Practice

Long ago in the distant past, an elephant stood on the edge of a river and roared. The ground shook and all the other animals hid behind a large bush. Some tried to push or pull others to make them look at the elephant, but not one would look. It took many hours for them to find the courage to come out from behind the bush.

Collect and sort

Collect other words that have 'oo' and 'u' in their spelling.

'oo'	'u'

Circle words where the 'oo' makes the same sound as in 'shook'.

Circle words where the 'u' makes the same sound as in 'pull'.

Learn

Use the Look, Say, Cover, Write, Check sheet to practise this week's spellings.

Year 3

Term 2 Week 1
Look, Say, Cover, Write, Check

Name:

Words

Look	Say	Cover	Write	Write	Write
stood					
shook					
bush					
push					
pull					
took					
stood					
shook					
bush					
push					
pull					
took					

APPENDIX F - TABLE A1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE ASSISTANTS IN THE THREE CORE SCHOOLS

	AGE	FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS	PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT	SERVICE IN SCHOOLS
SCHOOL A	Sue B. 45-50	Teaching Certificate	Teacher in a Special School	In post 8 years. Senior Assistant/Teacher line manager for other assistants and volunteerrrs. Oversees IEPs for SEN throughout the school.
	Julia 45-50	5 GCSEs including English and Maths	Clerical /secretarial work	In post 1 year. Appointed to provide Additional Literacy Support.
	Joyce 55-60	None on leaving school. OU STA Course since.	Medical Secretary, Assistant in private nursery schools	In post 12 years. Worked as a lunch time supervisor before her appointment and still covers 2 days per week. Key Stage 1 Literacy Support Assistant responsible for 'All About Me' project designed in conjunction with LEA peripatetic literacy support teacher.
	Liz 40-45	A levels in English & History	P.A. to Company Director – Wholesale firm	In post 5 years. Part-time contract mixture of permanent and temporary to cover Additional Learning Support Materials. Works in KS1 and KS2
SCHOOL B	Janice 35-40	Degree level	Staff recruitment officer	In post 3 years. Full time permanent contract. Responsibility for ICT throughout the school with special focus on Y5/Y6. This includes literacy & the internet. Some work with individual and groups of pupils with literacy difficulties. First Aid esp. for pupils with particular medical conditions. Would like to train to teach.
	Deborah 40-45	5GCSEs + Art A level	Responsible for window and in store displays for large retail store.	In post 4 years. Recently diverted from supporting children with SEN on an individual basis to work with groups on the Additional Learning Support Materials. Work with art and craft used by school in connection with school productions and exhibitions.
	Sonja 35-40	GCSE – 8 + 3 A levels HNC in business studies.	Retail store manager	In post 8 months – temporary part-time contract. Worked as a volunteer in school for 3 years prior to appointment. Literacy support for statemented pupils, school admin. Nations Numeracy Strategy Support.
	Diana 45-50	None, privately educated	Office manager.	In post 5 years, full-time permanent contract. Worked as a volunteer for 2 years before appointment. Supports all 5 infant classes: listens to reading every day on a rota basis, keeps reading records for each pupil. Works with groups in NLS sessions. Photocopies work for teachers. Checks first aid boxes.
SCHOOL C	Sandra 55-60	O & A levels – began to train as an accountant before marriage	Accounts clerk	Ion post 18 years: permanent full-time contract. SEN literacy assistant. Supports individuals and groups of pupils on a withdrawal basis throughout the school.
	Lesley 36-45	GCSE 5 A levels 1	Manageress of a shop. Clerical work	In post 3 years: Mixed full-time permanents and temp. contract. Works with Y2 classes. Worked as a lunch time supervisor prior to appointment and continues in this role. Supports low ability NLS/NNS groups and a statemented pupil am. Art & Crafts and IT pm. Responsible for Y2 school library.
	Karen 36-45	GCSE 6 plus commercial qualifications	Phototype setter	In post 2 years. Mixed full-time permanents and temp contract. R & Y1 classes. Worked as a volunteer and lunchtime supervisor before appointment. Supports low ability NLS/NNS groups and a statemented pupil am. PM art & Craft.

LESSON 13

Aim

To explore the spelling choices **ow, oe, o-e**

Materials

Word cards (PCM 2.28) for Word sort;
Sentence sheets (PCMs 2.47 and 2.48)

ACTIVITY	INSTRUCTIONS
1 **Spelling choices** *Time:* 3 mins	Rhyming words. Generate six rhyming words from the word **show**. Possible words: **bow, blow, crow, dough, flow, go, grow, glow, hoe, Joe, low, mow, no, row, slow, stow, snow, sow, toe, though, show, woe.**
2 **Spelling choices** *Time:* 5 mins	Play Word sort: **bow, blow, crow, dough, flow, go, grow, glow, hoe, Joe, low, mow, no, row, slow, stow, snow, sow, toe, though, show, woe.**
3 **Reading and writing words ending in** *oke* *Time:* 7 mins	Digraph splitting. Write the word **Joe** on the board. *What is this word again? ... Yes,* **Joe.** *Tell me the phonemes? ... Yes,* **J-oe** (point as you say them). *Now listen to this word –* **joke.** *What are the phonemes in joke? ... Yes,* **j-oe-k** (write as you say them.) *Does this look right? ... No. We have to split the* **oe** *sound and put the* **k** *in the middle.* Write **joke.** *That's how to write* **joke.** Do Quickwrite: **oke** × 5; and **coke, bloke, choke, poke, stoke, stroke, smoke, spoke, woke, broke** (× 2 each).
4 **Learning to read and spell tricky words** *Time:* 5 mins	Tricky words to be tested: **his, so.** Tricky words to be learned: **have, water.** **have** – stress final **e**; highlight this letter; no English words end in **v**; MS strategy. **water** – letter string **wa**; include such words as **was, want, wash**; '*I <u>wa</u>sh in <u>wa</u>ter.*'; MS strategy.

LESSON 16

Aim

To revise vowel digraphs
To practise reading two-syllable words

Materials

Flashcards **ay, ai, a-e, ow, oa, oe, o, o-e** (PCM 2.1);
Word strips (PCM 2.33) for Thumbs in game;
Counters;
Reading long words Worksheet (PCM 2.34);
Word cards (PCM 2.35) for word choice;
Sentence sheet (PCM 2.50)

ACTIVITY	INSTRUCTIONS
1 **Revision of *a* and *o* digraphs** *Time:* 5 mins	Practise Flashcards **ay, ai, a-e, ow, oa, oe, o, o-e.** Play Thumbs in game: **may, most, make, mole, moan** **spray, spoke, Spain, sprain, sprite** **pole, pail, paint, paste, post** **drain, drone, day, date, drake** **laid, lake, loaf, load, lane.**
2 **Reading two-syllable words** *Time:* 5 mins	Do Reading long words (demo): **mainline, pancake, snowman, milkshake, unload, disgrace, maiden, haystack, railway.**
3 **Reading two-syllable words** *Time:* 5 mins	Do Reading long words (worksheet): **haystack, railway, goalpost, handmade, caveman, postman, unfold, hostess, mistrust, gravestone, away.** Play Word choice.
4 **Learning to read and spell tricky words** *Time:* 5 mins	Tricky words to be tested: **here, us.** Dictation: **We liked them because they were good fun. We went to meet their sister who lived in a small house in the next street.**

Appendix H

Sonya: Classroom Assistant in post from September 1999: volunteer parent helper for 3 years prior to appointment as an assistant
Observation: Spring Term 2000: Two Year 3 boys with language and literacy difficulties: session length 45 minutes.
Letter sounds are in plain font; letter names in italic font.

Speaker	Speech	Comment
SONYA	Have you got your pencils? *(As she hands out 'ay' handwriting sheets)*	
Tom	A bug, a bug *(pointing to the picture on the sheet)*	
SONYA	Come on Tom, we haven't got much time, you were late today.	Assistants often mention pressure of time.
Tom	*(Ignoring Sonya and speaking to Craig)* Oh look a fly, a little fly.	
SONYA	Come on, 1 to 10. Have you got a pencil? You have, good.	
Tom	I knew there was something on my face.	
SONYA	Come on boys, 1 to 10 and the date. What is the date? Do you know what the date is?	
Tom	The sun is everywhere, mummy's sunny, girlies sunny.	
SONYA	What's the date? Do you remember from writing it earlier?	
Tom	Yea, Yea, Yea	
SONYA	The date (emphasised)	
Craig	7.4.00	
SONYA	Good.7.4.00. You've got your 7s round the right way. Well done! Tom's done his 1 to 10, have you done yours Craig?	
Craig	I've got hiccups.	

Speaker	Speech	Comment
SONYA	Have you?	
Craig	Done it.	
SONYA	Right, no. 1, flat	The boys settle down as the test begins.
Tom	I want to do bat.	
SONYA	Spelling no. 2, battle, battle, no. 3, mat	
Craig	These are all easy ones today	
SONYA	Hm, Hm.; rat, then no. 5, rattle	
Tom	Has that got t.t. in it?	
SONYA	Remember we did these last week. You thought of that one because you thought of something else, that you put at the end of rattle to make another word – rattle?	
Tom	r a t t l e	
SONYA	Right, but you thought of rattlesnake, didn't you? No. 6, atlas, do you remember that? What would we find if you looked in an atlas?	Cueing in to previous learning
Tom	a t	
Craig	All kinds of pictures, more likely.	
SONYA	Yes, maps mainly, atlas.	
Tom	a t?	
SONYA	I can't say, it's a spelling test. Think of the sounds in the word, atlas, no. 7, attic, the room at the top of the house, attic.	
Craig	There's no kicking k in that	Making knowledge explicit

Speaker	Speech	Comment
SONYA	No. 8, spat	
Craig	*sp a t*	
Tom	*These all have got 'at' in them.*	Recognising pattern learnt last week.
SONYA	That's right. This is what we were doing last week, isn't it? The 'at' sound No. 9 sounds a bit different. Listen, it sounds different – what.	Confirming Tom's observation
Tom & Craig	What, that's easy.	
SONYA	No. 9, what.	
Craig	Atlas hasn't got t, oh yes, it has.	Beginning of the word rather than middle or end.
SONYA	And no. 10	
Craig	*(pointing to what)* That's a h sound	
SONYA	No. 10, cat. Now that's nice writing Tom. It's red pen time. Positive reinforcement	
Craig	*(hiccuping loudly)*	
SONYA	Dear, dear, you've still got hiccups. Oh, Look, you've got the right letters but in the wrong order.	Recognition of attempt
Craig	Oh, bother	
SONYA	t and t which you got right and then its l e *(marking rattle)* Look you got that one right. Now atlas, a t l a *(emphasised)* s. Attic is almost right but not quite, a t t i c, what and cat right. That's 7/10. They were quite hard some of these.	
Craig	Oh	
SONYA	*(turns and marks Tom's spelling)* The first six right, attic, almost right.	

Speaker	Speech	Comment
Tom	It was so close. And that's a h in there like you said. *(Turns to Craig)* You'll haveto try extra hard next week)	
The boys have just been tested on the 10 spellings from last week.		
SONYA	Right, well done! Shall we find our sheet for today and then we can find some words for today.	
Tom	If only I'd put t t in attic	
SONYA	Look at this one *(points to 'ay' worksheet)* nice picture on this one.	
Tom	Who's that, who's that?	
SONYA	It must be the farmer, or the farmer's wife, rather.	
Tom	I'm going to draw someone falling down *(presumable from the hayloft in the picture)*	
SONYA	You can draw someone falling down but you've got to write the sentences first.	*Negotiation*
SONYA	Right, which letters have we got here today? What are the two letters at the top of the page, Craig?	Focusing attention.
Craig	Spiders *(alluding to the picture)*	Craig will later attempt to spell spider (spayder) Picture cue – misleading.
SONYA	Yes you do get spiders in barns, don't you? Right, which letters are they?	*Accepting contribution.*
Craig	*a*	
SONYA	*a* and ?	
Craig	pay	
SONYA	Yes, that's a good word, but what letters are they? That's an a and that's a??	
Craig	*a* and *u*	
Tom	Yea, *u*	

Speaker	Speech	Comment
SONYA	With a long tail like that? What do you think it is Tom?	Focusing on detail
Tom,	A y	
SONYA	A y, that's right. OK, Tom, can you carefully go over the letters and then nice and neatly at the side, Tom?	Tom's attention has wandered
Tom	Yea	
SONYA	Can you go over the letters and then write nice and neatly at the side? What kind of sound do you think they make? Craig, you said it in one of the words didn't you.? Let's have a look. I don't think it's down on the worksheet.	Using child's contribution again
Craig	Nay	
SONYA	It's an 'ay' sound. You said pay, didn't you.	
Tom	Hay	
SONYA	*I don't think we've got pay down there, so that's an extra one.*	The boys are used to generating words which are then used for their spelling list for the next week.
Craig	Nay	
SONYA	Yes, it does sound like that but it isn't spelt like that. We're looking for 'ay' word and you've already thought of one.	Alternative word for no!
Craig	Pay	
SONYA	Pay, that's right.	The answer Sonya was looking for
Tom	Say	
SONYA	Say, saying, yes, that's right.	
Tom	We're doing 'sa' words now, aren't we?	

Speaker	Speech	Comment
SONYA	Try and do these a little more carefully. We'll rub that one out, I think, because the a's not joined at the top.	Ignoring 'sa' or mishearing?
Craig	Oh, I can't work it out. *(Referring to what he has written)*	
SONYA	Well, if you can't work it out, then other people aren't going to be able to work it out, are they? Do it nice and slowly.	Giving a reason for legible handwriting.
Tom	I just needed t t in attic	
SONYA	Yes, you did, and you got 9/10, didn't you.	
Tom	And Craig only got 7/10, he's really dim.	
SONYA	Well, it might be a different story next week, mightn't it? Make sure you write at the side in nice neat writing, Tom.	Keeping the peace?
Tom	OK	
SONYA	That's better	
Craig	I'll beat him next time, I know because these are easier, those were harder for me.	
SONYA	They were harder, weren't they? Well, you asked me to make them harder. Attics quite a tricky word, isn't it?	
Tom	So close	
Craig	I would have known	

Speaker	Speech	Comment
SONYA	You got rattle right but you put the l e round the wrong way on battle, but you got it right on rattle. Come on then... *(boys interrupt, indistinct)* we're going to think up some *a y* words. We're going to look in the dictionary as well, for some word that might begin *a y*	
Tom	*a y*	
SONYA	Craig, just do that one again for me because I don't think you did that quite right. No, it doesn't go like that does it? I knew you knew how to do that one. That looks much better than this one, it looks all sloppy. Now Craig, how do you think you spell the word you suggested?	
Craig	Pa**SONYA** Yes, pay	
Craig	p a y	
SONYA	That's right	
Craig	In what place *(looking at the sheet)* None of them begin with p	
SONYA	No, they don't, do they	The boys write pay
SONYA	Now, what were you doing at break? What do you go out and do?	Trying to generate more 'ay' words – knows the answer she is looking for.
Craig	Take	To rhyme with break?
SONYA	But take is t a kicking k . It's got an *a* sound in it.	
Craig	Bake	Triggered by break/take?
SONYA	Bake's got an *a* sound it *(laughs)* but we want words with the a y sound	Confusing?
Tom	Cake	
SONYA	No, I'm afraid not. What were you doing at break time?	
Tom,	Take, bake	

Speaker	Speech	Comment
SONYA	No, were you chasing each other around, you were..?	Trying a new clue for the word play
Craig	Cake	
Tom	Bake	
SONYA	You weren't baking each other, you were p p, what were you doing?	
Craig	Pinching each other	Initial letter cue
SONYA	I hope you weren't pinching each other	
Tom	Punching each other	
SONYA	You were playing with each other	Finally giving them the required word.
Craig	No way	
SONYA	Why, is that too childish, too babyish?	Too old to play
Tom	Well, the play is right but not the play with Craig, on the play station	A favoured activity at home
SONYA	Well, you weren't playing on the play station at break, you were playing on the playground. So, how do you write play? *(The boys write)* Good That's nice writing, Tom.	
Tom	Thank you.	
SONYA	Can you think of any *a* y, a y sounds?	Mixture of letter names and initial sounds
Tom	What does that spell? *(pointing to may)*	
SONYA	That's may – may I have a piece of cake please, or the month of May.	Using word in context.
Tom	*Oh, I was going to say that*	

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Speaker	Speech	Comment
SONYA	What would the month of May have though, that that one hasn't got? How would you write May?	Using opportunity for teaching punctuation.
Tom	I would have an e	
SONYA	It would be written in the same way but it would have something a little bit different.	Guess the answer?
Craig	It couldn't sound l k because that's at the end of talk, t o l k	
SONYA	t a l k , well done. Now the month of May would have a capital letter	
Tom	March, march	A word with two meanings?
SONYA	'ar' *(as in march)* I think we did 'ar'	
Craig	How about Homer, Bart?	Linking to TV programmes – culture or an attempt to get off the point?
SONYA	I don't think we need any Simpsons here, do we Shall we look in the dictionary under a y?	No prior preparation as these dictionaries do not have any 'words beginning 'ay'
(Indistinct chatter, words suggested but unclear, for several seconds).		
SONYA	Look, Craig's thought of way, which way is it to the shops?	Getting boys back on task.
Craig	day	
SONYA	Day, but I think you've got that one on your sheet.	
Craig	I've put way and wayt	Need to know that ay comes at the ends of words
Tom	Gay, you are gay	
SONYA	If you wait for somebody, it's w a i t. It does sound the Tome a and I can sound very much like ...*(Tom interrupts, excuse me, excuse me)* a and y word	
Tom	Gay	

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Craig	That's a rude word	
SONYA	No, it's not, it means you're happy.	Social conditions.
Craig	It is a bit rude if you see them doing it. The different gay, that different gay.	Two meanings for the same word
SONYA	Oh, alright, we're just meaning it's happy.	
Craig	Slay	
Tom	I don't like that very much	Not clear whether he is referring to gay or slay
SONYA	We can have slay, how would you write slay, your word slay? Do you know what that means, if you slay somebody?	Building vocabulary knowledge
Craig	s l a v e	
SONYA	That's slave, if you slay somebody it means you kill them, which wouldn't be very nice really.	
(Guttural choking noises from the boys)		
SONYA	When you said slay, I thought of the other sleigh. The sleigh you go on in the snow.	
Craig	The Christmas sleigh.	
SONYA	Yes but that's spelt differently	
Tom	Gay, way, play, may	
SONYA	What about stay, stay where you are, don't move.	
Tom	I will move	
SONYA	How would you write stay? *(The boys write)*	

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SONYA	**Good -*emphasised***	
Tom	You know in the Simpson's he says, I'm going to tell everyone you're a a burglar and he says, "Not so fast"	
SONYA	I don't think this is really what we want. Can you write these other good words down that Craig's thinking of?	
Tom,	Hay	
SONYA	Good, what's this here (*Pointing to the picture)*	
Craig & Tom	Hay, hay	
SONYA	Yes, but we have got that one. See some of these words, they're linked to the picture, aren't they?	
Tom	bug	
Craig	Barn, barnyard	
Tom	Have you got a bug on yours?	
SONYA	What's this word? Do you know what this word is?	
Craig	Bay	
SONYA	What does bay mean? Do you know what a bay is?	Constantly probing meanings of words boys suggest.
Tom,	Bay means, baby. What about bathing?	
SONYA	I don't think.....	
Tom	Has yours got a bug on it?	
Craig	Yes	During this off task behaviour Sonya has not raised her voice. She keeps posing questions to get the boys back on task.
SONYA	Have you heard of the word bay?	

Speaker	Speech	Comment
Tom,	You don't have a bug.	
Craig	I do, do you mean this bug? I'm drawing millions of bugs.	
SONYA	Can you find a in the dictionary? Where does a come in the alphabet?	
Tom,	attic	
SONYA	Yes *(laughing)* attic. Where does a come in the dictionary?	
Tom	Let me find it, it's easy.	
SONYA	Good, now can you find any words beginning ay – where does y come in the dictionary. *(The boys look)*	
Tom	I'm so close I can already smell it. I've got to r, no I've got to t.	
SONYA	Can you find ay – anything that begins with ay? There may not be very much. *(Turns to Craig)* Now you've got a but where does y come in the alphabet? Is it anywhere near f? Is it before or after f?	
Craig	After	
SONYA	Yes, so you're going to have to keep turning some pages, as we must be getting nearer I don't think we are going to be very lucky here, *a w, a x,* I don't think we are going to find anything. Good Tom, you're on the right page, *a x, a z, a v* but no *a y.* That's not happened to use before, has it: We have always been able to find something beginning with the sound. Can you think when you were in Years 1 and 2, did you do some modelling out of some brown stuff?	Back to original quest for ay words.
Tom	Clay	
SONYA	That's right, clay	
Craig	clay, exclaim	

Speaker	Speech	Comment
SONYA	Exclaim's a good word isn't it? It's not an a y word, it's an a i word. Exclaims a good word. Did you just think of that or did you read that Craig? How do you think you write clay?	In the dictionary perhaps, no other books are around.
Craig	c l a y	
SONYA	Good	
Craig	Hooray	
SONYA	Can you write that one down then?	Did not pick up on hooray.
Craig	I already writ it down.	Immature apeech
SONYA	Where have you written it then? Oh, it's a curly c, nor a kicking k.	
Craig	Oh, barty doll! Oh look there's *(indistinct)* They're meant to be cartoons, aren't they. That's Sonic, That's funny.	Looking at the computer-generated work on display.
SONYA	Can you alter that one to a curly c? Just alter it so you know how to spell it.	
Tom	There's Home…	
SONYA	Away, I went away, away.	
Craig	Why	
SONYA	I'm giving you a clue here – I went away. What kind of word is that. How do you spell away.?	Children need to know what the adult expect.
Craig	a w a y	
Tom,	No thank you, I've already got way.	
SONYA	Away, that's different. Oh, handwriting Craig, come on. I think you should have another go. Rest it *(the worksheet)* on the table, not on top of your bag. You're supposed to be getting your handwriting really beautiful, that wont help.	

Speaker	Speech	Comment
Tom	Is this good enough?	Seeking adult approval in view of peer failure.
SONYA	Yours is quite neat Tom. Remember when you are doing your handwriting in class as well.	
Tom	Yes	
SONYA	Right, shall we put some of these down now for spellings? Have you got your homework log books? Can you write…	
Tom	How about no way?	Prefix no, root way as in a + way?
SONYA	Well, that's just the word way again, isn't it?	
Tom	Oh, look at all the funny pictures. They are allowed to stick funny cartoon pictures up.	
SONYA	Come on Tom	
Tom	I wonder what it's got to do with cartoons	
SONYA	It's all done on the computer. You'll get to do things like that when you are older. 1 to 10.	
Tom	Oh, that's cool!	
SONYA	But you have to work hard at things like this first	Expectations- school culture
Tom	You mean I actually have to…. have to finish this?	
SONYA	*You do, get your homework* log book our	
Tom	Do you mean people who've done that (the computer work) have to pass this test first?	Seeking clarification
SONYA	Oh yes, they've all done the same kind of things as you..	
Craig	We'll be the second to pass it	
SONYA	Put the date	

Speaker	Speech	Comment
Tom	You know while they're cutting out cartoons it's also getting their hand control better, isn't it?	Linking information
SONYA	Yes, can you cut out neatly	Query, does it help?
Tom	A little bit neatly	
Craig	That's why I got a merit before	Rewards/Sanctions
SONYA	**1 to 10**	
Craig	Tom, do you know I've got 12, no 13 merits	
Tom	No, and I don't want to know	Rivalry
SONYA	Where are you going to choose one? *(from worksheet or words generated)*	Getting boys back on task again.
Grey	play	
SONYA	How do you write play?	
Tom	clay	
SONYA	Remember which c Craig. Now choose one	
Craig	way	
SONYA	Choose one Tom.	
Tom	play	
SONYA	We've just had play	
Tom	Oh, gay	
SONYA	gay	

Speaker	Speech	Comment
Tom	Let' see, put that in your cauldron and stir it up	Is this in reference to the meanings of gay?
Craig	pay	
Tom	I'll pay for your....	
SONYA	Your choice, Tom.	
Tom	stay	
SONYA	Tom's chosen stay...	
Craig	slay – s l a y	
Tom	jay	
SONYA	A jay is a bird	Using suggestion to promote learning
Craig	hay, hay, what about hay?	
Tom	bay	
SONYA	You're choosing bay. I want to choose the last one. I'm choosing away	
Tom,	We've already had bay	
SONYA	No, is that a b?	
Tom	Oh	
SONYA	That way it's a p. You have to be very careful. Away, away is the last one. Now, Mum's got to be able to read yours Craig. Now then pop your homework log book on one side. We are going to think up some sentence about the picture and use some ay words. That's what we are going to do. There's one ay word we can certainly use, isn't there. Can you think up a sentence, you thought of some really good ones last week, didn't you?	
Craig	A mosquito bit May.	

Speaker	Speech	Comment
SONYA	That's May, is it, that's her name, the lady's name? Now what do you start with?	Reminder of punctuation, misinterpreted?
Craig	a mos	
SONYA	Yes, but it would be a capital, wouldn't it? Mosquito – m o s q	
Craig	q?	
SONYA	What usually comes after q?	Hoping for *u*
Craig	i t	
SONYA	u (emphasised) i t o mosquito	
Craig	b i t e	
SONYA	That says bite. What do you think bit is?	
Craig	b it	
SONYA	Yes, so you need to miss the *e* off	
Craig	Mm	
SONYA	Now, what would that have, that word? *(pointing)* If it's her name -	Punctuation reminder: Link to NLS
Y3 T2	how would you write it?	
Craig	Oh, a capital.	
SONYA	Yes. Tom can you think of a sentence?.	
Tom	Yes, 'Go away – no traders'	Background knowledge?
SONYA	*(laughing)* That's a good sentence, that is. Is that what she's shouting – that lady– no traders? You can put that if you want to put that. Are you going to put that in a speech bubble?	

Speaker	Speech	Comment
Tom	OK	
SONYA	I hope you're remembering your handwriting.	
Tom	At least I am	It is clear that Craig is not.
SONYA	Have you read that sentence , Craig? If you need help with spelling are you going to ask me? *(Turns to Tom and points to worksheet)* Write it here. I should write it first and then put the speech bubble around it, Tom. What are you going to write, do you remember?	Tom has problems organising his work on a page.
Tom	Go – g	
SONYA	Now, if you're starting a sentence, what do you need?	Punctuation reminder
Tom	A capital	
SONYA	That's right. You have to think about that, don't you? Now Craig..	
Craig	There is a spider *(spayder)*	Mislead by reference to words in the picture having ay
SONYA	It doesn't have 'ay' in it at all. You've got, you've got the 'der' right	
Craig	Oh	
SONYA	Go, that's right. What's your next sentence then? What are you writing next? You've got 'A mosquito bit May'	
Craig	I can't do that one *(with spider because it doesn't have ay)*	
SONYA	Right, shall we rub it out?	
Tom	Excuse me, excuse me. How do you spell traders?	
SONYA	t r a d – now think hard about your d – we don't want a b do we? We want a d. Concentrate Tom.	

Speaker	Speech	Comment
Tom	I don't want to	
SONYA	Oh I think you do, because you like to do the colouring.	Cajoling tone, rewards/sanctions.
Craig	How do you write Mrs.?	
SONYA	Just rub that bit out, capital M then a r then a s and a full stop after it, m r s and a full stop at the bottom, there, after the s. (*pointing*)	
Tom	Go away	
SONYA	That's only trad, you haven't got traders. How do you make the 'er' sound?	
Tom	s	Confused with plurals, perhaps?
SONYA	No, that would be trads t r a d e r s	
Tom	e r s, that's not going to make any sense, is it?	Unclear what he means.
SONYA	What's your next sentence then Craig?	
Craig	Mrs. May said	
(Tom interrupts – indistinct)		
SONYA	Can you think up another sentences, one with a y in it.?	
Tom	Are there any words on this art? *(looking at wall display).* I say, 'Go away'	
SONYA	You see here – go away – away is all one word. There's no space between a and away.	
Tom	I say, go away.	
SONYA	What's this here?	
Tom	hay	

Speaker	Speech	Comment
SONYA	Can you think of anything to say about the hay?	
Tom	*(laughing)* say about the hay	
SONYA	What are you writing Craig? Tell me what you are writing.	
Craig	The hay c e p d	
SONYA	kept – kep t *(emphasising the t)* What's the sound at the end of kept?	
Craig	c e p d	
SONYA	Kept, what' the sound at the end of kept t t?	Very difficult to discriminate – does sound d May also be conserving 'ed' regular verb ending
Craig	t t	
SONYA	Yes, and it's a kicking k at the start. The hay kept	
Tom	It it	
Craig	blowing away	
SONYA	Think about how you are doing your b	
Craig and Tom	b l o w i n g away	
SONYA	Now, what's this?	
Craig	Mrs. May *seide*	
SONYA	said s a id, you've got a e in there	
Tom	There's two words in here	
SONYA	It hasn't got an *e* at the end either, said hasn't.	
Tom	Look at the hay, it always grows on May	

Speaker	Speech	Comment
SONYA	Mrs. May said	
Tom	Excuse me, I've got two words, 'Look at the hay, it always grows on May.'	
Craig	'Pay me back'	
SONYA	Ok, who does she want to pay her back? What does she mean by that?	
Craig	She means like, she's talking to someone and she's saying "Pay me back" cause she didn't get her money off them.	
SONYA	Ah, right. I see. Let's have a look Tom. Look at the hay. It always grows on May.	
Craig	Can I colour in now?.	
SONYA	Yes. Always grows on May or in May?	
Tom	On May	
SONYA	Do you mean the month of May?	Seeking clarification
Tom	Yes	
SONYA	Well, you wouldn't say 'It grows on May' You would say, 'It grows in May.'	
Tom	Oh, stupid me, stupid me. I am a rumberee	Pilot school language programme – self-esteem issues.
SONYA	Look at the hay. Now I can't make out that word. What's that letter there? I It's the wrong one, isn't it.	
Tom	Everything's spoilt!	
SONYA	You've done it up-side-down, haven't you?	
Tom,	It's the worse thing I've ever seen.	
SOPNJA	It's not as nice writing as you can do, is it?	

Speaker	Speech	Comment
Tom	No, and it's worser than the other thing.	
SONYA	*Well, rub that out because you need to ask me about the spelling.*	
Tom	I'll rub out the speech bubble now.	
SONYA	No, don't rub out the speech bubble, that's fine, otherwise we shall never get there.	
Tom	I'll rub out this	
SONYA	No, don't rub it all out. Nice careful colouring Craig. What colour are you going to do the ladder?	*A reminder, not praise*
Tom	Does that look neater?	
SONYA	That's better. Right, 'Look at the hay' Do you know what hay is?	Building knowledge
Tom	Yes	
SONYA	*What is it?*	
Tom	It's a hay	
SONYA	It's hay?	
Craig	Yellow stuff sort of stick and that	
SONYA	Yes, but that's straw, isn't it. Hay is usually dried out grass type stuff.	Repeating stuff – less formal?
Tom	That's much more better	
SONYA	Look at the hay. It grows in May.	

Speaker	Speech	Comment
Tom	Excuse me, I'm doing a dot because that's the end.	A full stop.
SONYA	Ok, what will you start the next sentence with if that's the end of that sentence? Are you going to write another sentence? Look at the hay. You've got it here, haven't you. That doesn't make sense, if you leave it like that You've put 'Look at the hay, it and nothing else..	
Tom	It, oh I accidentally forgot to rub out that. Now I'm going to do a ring round it.	
SONYA	You're going to put that in a speech bubble. May is saying that, is she? Can you think of one more sentence Tom?	Guiding work, lots of prompts but not doing the work.
Craig	Mine's a bit scribbly really.	
SONYA	That's a nice bright yellow. Can we think of one more sentence with these ay words?	
Craig	Look, I've found some clay.	
SONYA	Look I've found some clay	
Long pause		
SONYA	Look at the hay	
Tom	I know, "What is today? It's May"	
SONYA	Now, 'what' we had in our spelling test earlier on, so you know how to spell what	Links to earlier, known work.
Tom	Yes, do you know I also have my lessons with Mrs. R.	
SONYA	What	
Tom	What is	
SONYA	Today, That's a word we didn't put down, isn't it? Now, what would you put after that. What is today?	

Speaker	Speech	Comment
Tom	It is May.	
SONYA	What needs to got after 'What is today?' What kind of sentence is that?	Trying to make knowledge explicit?
Tom	A full stop	
SONYA	Not a full stop – something else. What kind of speech is that?	
Tom	Speech marks	Misled by Sonya's 'speech is that?'
SONYA	Well you could....	
Tom	Question mark	
SONYA	Well done, yes.	
Tom	How do you spell....?	
SONYA	I'm sure you can spell it. How do you write is? That's right Now do you write May like that? May is on your sheet here. Have you finished Craig? Crumbs, we haven't done reading, we are late today. Gather up your bits. **END OF 45 MINUTE SESSION.**	*(Sounds of classes being dismissed.*

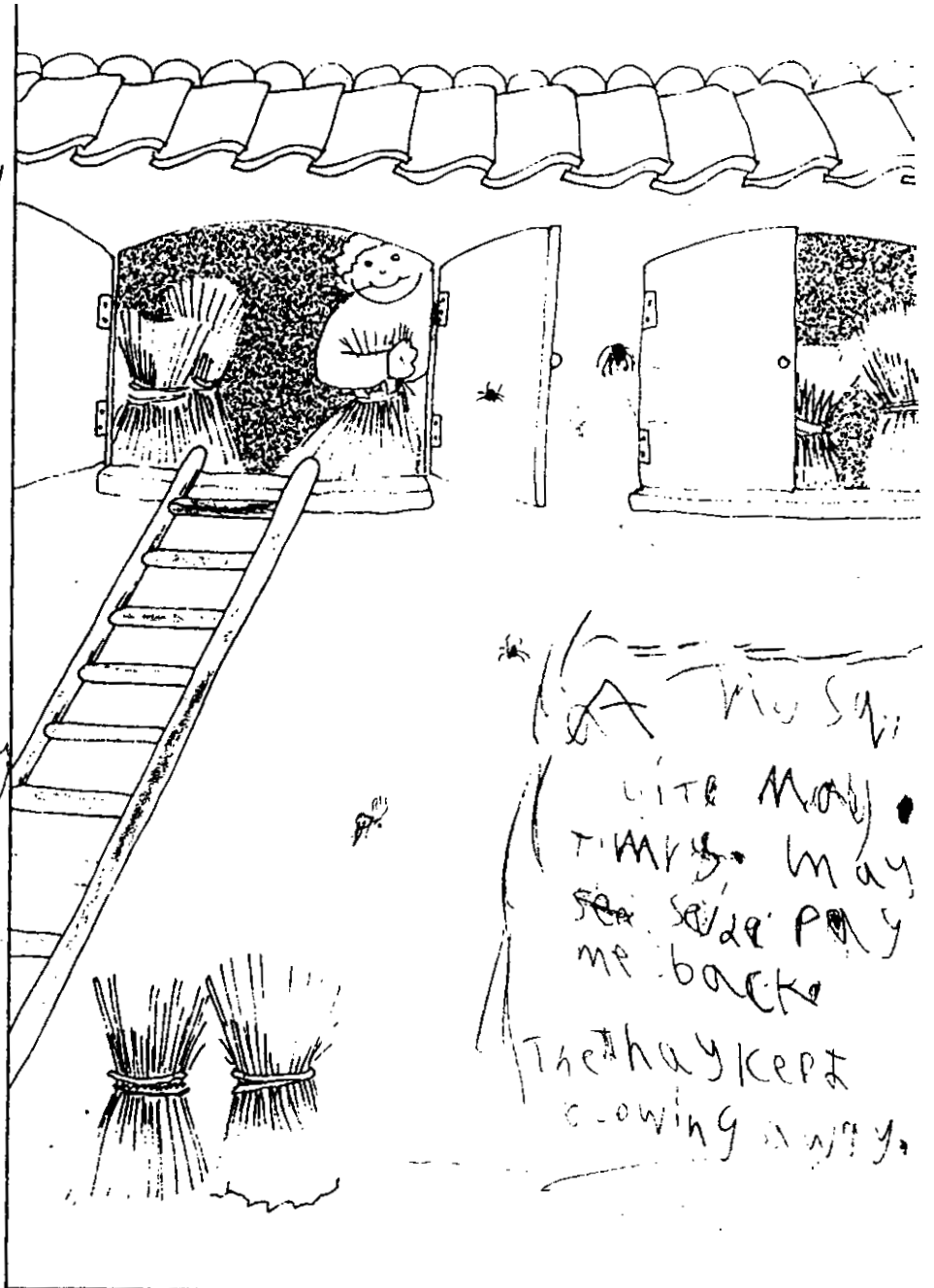
:e over and then write the letter pattern.

ay ay ay ay ay ay ay

do the same with these words.

ay say may mayhay
ray Ray Play
nay

ay ay bay bay
ayt bay
nay stay



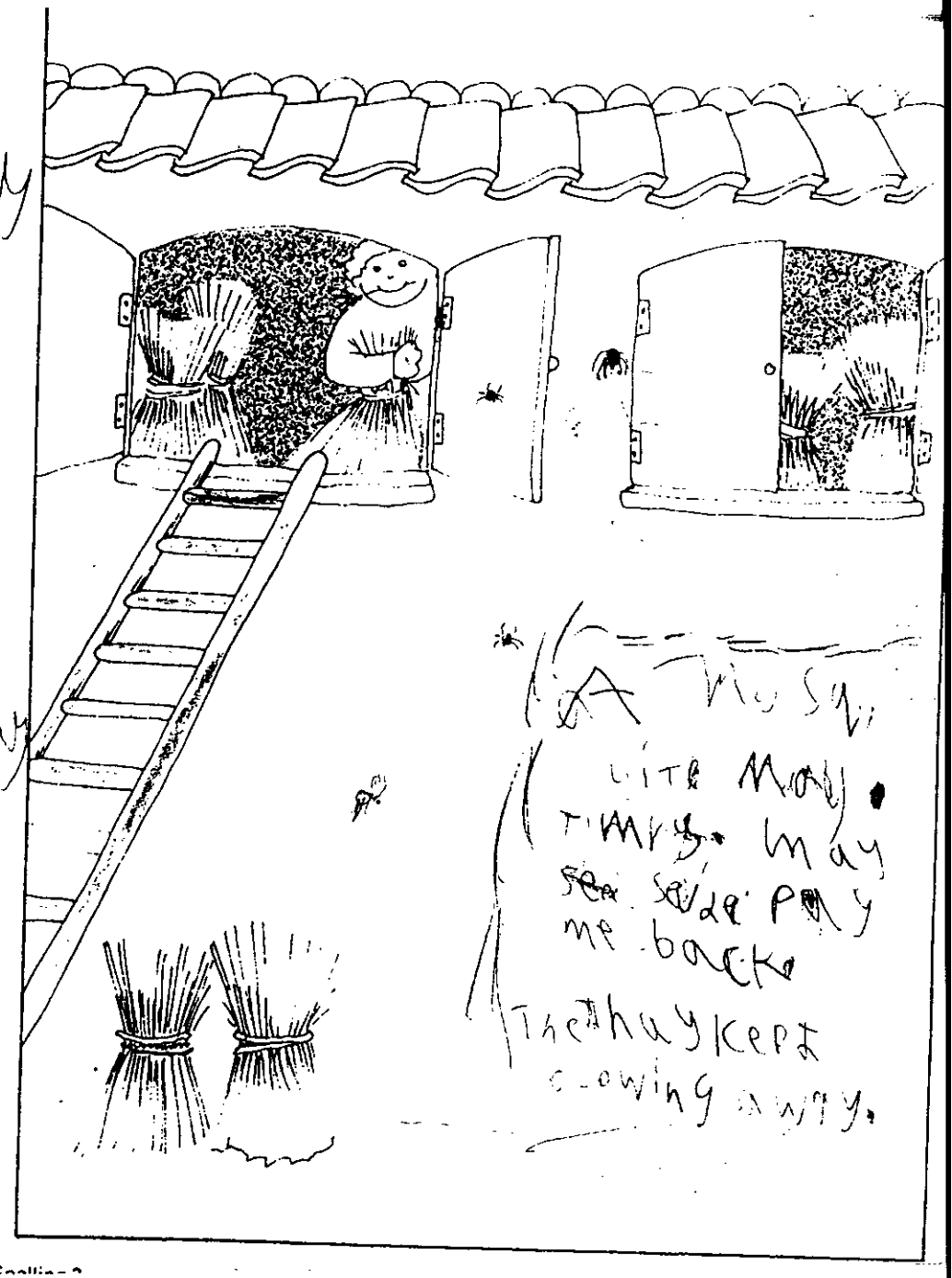
:e over and then write the letter pattern.

ay ay ay ay ay ay ay

do the same with these words.

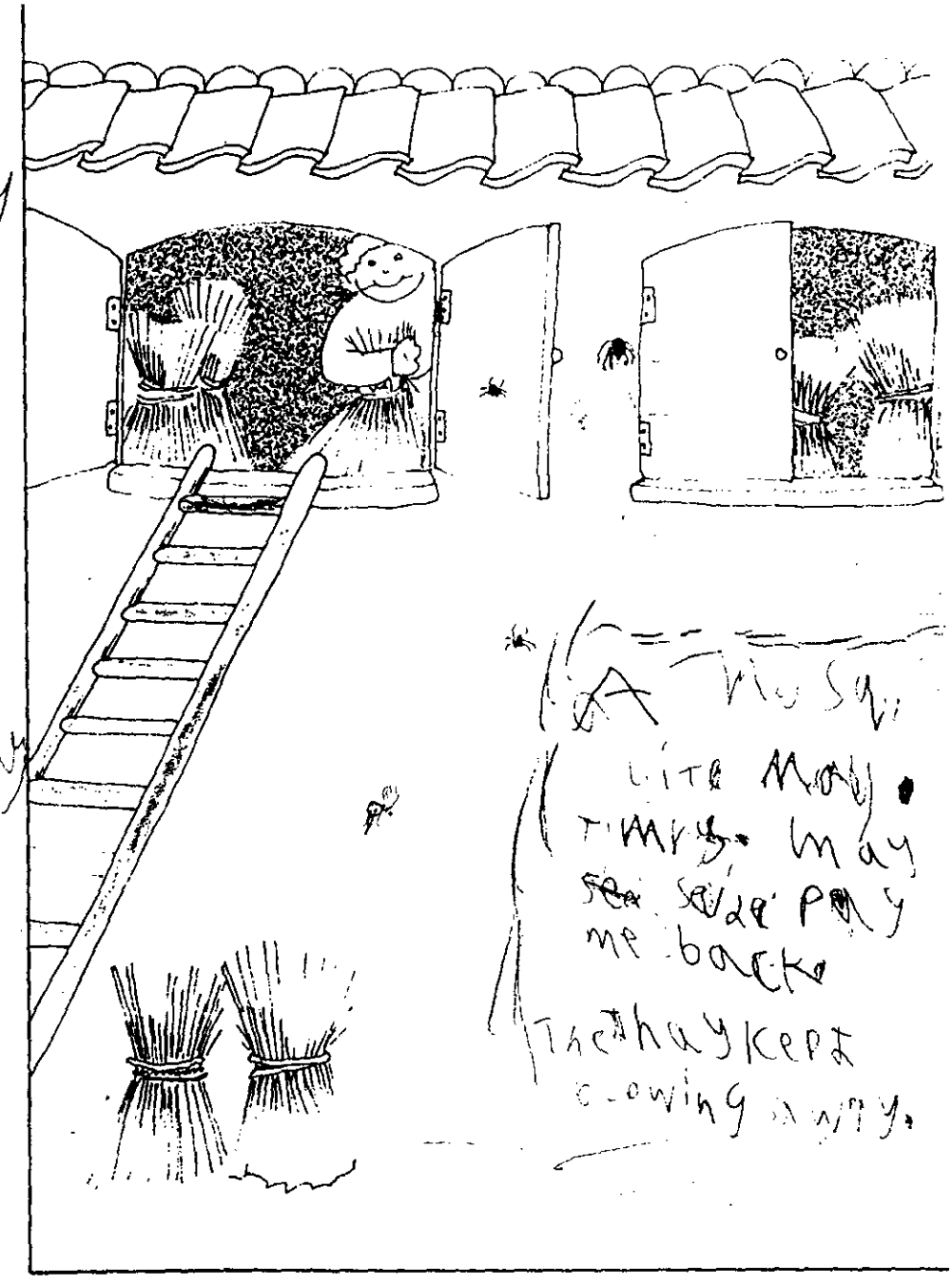
ay say may mayhay ay
ray Ray Play
nay

ay ay bay bay
ayt
ray bay
stay



:e over and then write the letter pattern.

do the same with these words.



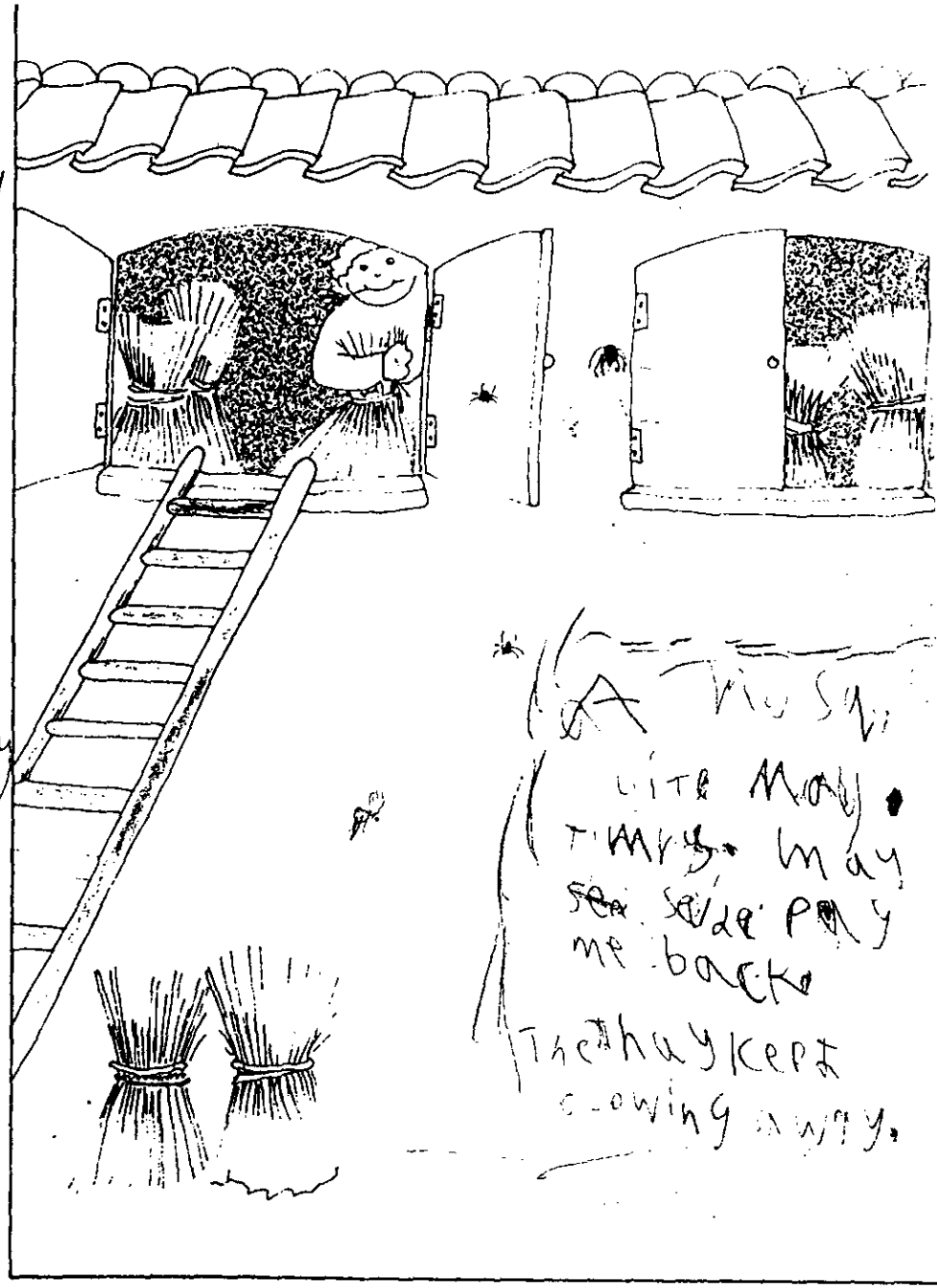
:e over and then write the letter pattern.

ay ay ay ay ay ay ay

do the same with these words.

ay say may mayhay
ray ray Play
nay

ay ay bay bay
bay
bay



ne .....

:e over and then write the letter pattern.

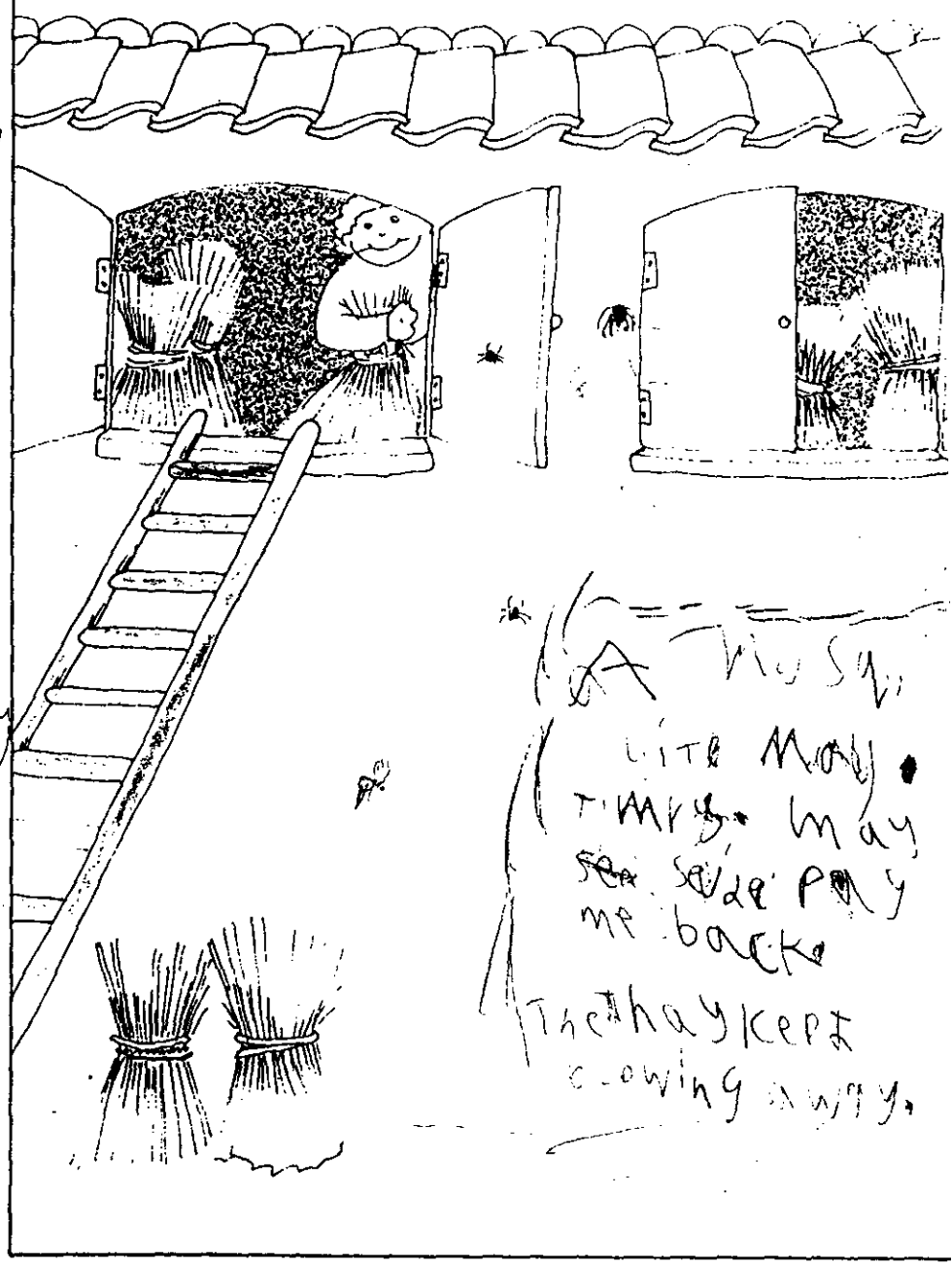
ay ay ay ay ay ay ay

do the same with these words.

ay say may may hay hay
ray ray Play
nay

ay ay bay bay bay
ay t
say stay bay

Cover each word and write it in the farmyard.



Supporting Literacy Development
School C
Classroom Assistant Sandra working with a Y1 Child

Sandra supports children who are having difficulty acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills, either individually, in pairs or in a small group. An area of the staffroom has been equipped with a computer, shelving, a desk and chairs as all support is carried out on a withdrawal basis. The children may also have support from another assistant in class. Much of the material has been developed by Sandra during her long service in the school.

Sandra was observed working with Kayleigh for about 12-15 minutes. The tape recorder was switched off and put away as Kayleigh found its presence too distracting. She kept asking questions and wanting to hear her voice or hear some music (mumic) played.

The alphabet was set out in a crescent shape with **'at'** in the centre. Kayleigh was asked to find letters to put in front of '**at**' to make some new words, e.g. "Find me the letter *b* which makes the b sound, good" What word have you made?" Kayleigh made **bat, mat, pat** and **sat,** and copied the words into her book.

at

Sandra "Now I want you to be really clever. Put the **a** back and in the space put the letter *e* which makes the e sound. We had '**at**'. We've now got '**et'.**"
Kayleigh, "**et?'**
Sandra, "That's right '**et'.** It's not a word like '**at**', but we can make some more rhyming words just like **bat, mat, pat** and **sat**. Find me the **b** again, what have we made?"

Kayleigh, "**bit**"

Sandra, "We could have made **bit** if we had **'it'** but we've got **'et'**, **b** and **'et'** make **bet**. Let's try some of the others. Find **p** for me."

Kayleigh, putting the **p** in front of **'et'**, "pet"

Sandra, "That's right, clever girl. Now try the **s.**"

Kayleigh puts the *p* back and takes the *s*, "set". She then builds met. Pet, set and met are written in her book. She reads the 7 words she has made to Sandra.

Sandra, "Do you know what bet means?"

Kayleigh, "You hit it."

Sandra, "What do you hit?"

Kayleigh, "ball".

Sandra, "Ah, you do hit a ball with a bat. What about bet, b et (emphasising et), do you know what bet means?" Kayleigh looks puzzled. "I thought that might be the problem. Bet, some people bet on the lottery, buy a ticket and hope their bet will win them a lot of money. Have you heard of the national lottery?"

Kayleigh, "Yes, TV"

Comment: It was still unclear whether Kayleigh associated this with betting or entertainment on TV.

Kayleigh then read two or three pages of her book about Biff, Chip and the magic key from the Oxford Reading Tree scheme. She was word perfect.

Conversation with Sandra following the observation.

I wondered about bet. There are so many meanings Kayleigh doesn't know. Her reading is really coming along. She sort of soaks up words. I send home her tin with the new words for the next book and she can read them the next day. She doesn't seem to forget them either. It's the comprehension that's the problem. If you ask her questions about the story she can't tell you. She'll just talk about the pictures. I don't think she links the key with the adventures the children have at all. She loves to copy writing, but she can never tell you what she wants to write, even if she's heard a story several times. *(This problem was also apparent when working in class with Karen on the story of the Three Little Pigs).* She doesn't

remember how to write words – she's just about mastered her name, not that that's an easy one. She's quite an ungainly child. Her gross motor co-ordination is very poor. She's seen the occupational therapist and been given some exercises to do at home. She finds drawing difficult although her writing is quite neat now. She doesn't remember instructions. Karen says that if you take your eyes off her for two minutes she will be working away doing entirely the wrong thing.

APPENDIX J

List of books chosen by Year 2 Pupils
Helped by Lesley, Classroom Assistant – Spring Term 2000
School C

Book Title	**Author**
Floella	*Jane Haliday*
Dogs	*Michaela Miller*
Harry's Aunt	*Sheila Lavelle*
Tyrannosaurus was a Beast (Poems)	*Jack Prelutsky*
Guinea Pigs	*RSPCA*
Flat Stanley	*Jeff Brown*
Autumn Story	*Jill Barklem*
Alligator Tales & Crocodile Cakes	*Nicola Moor*
Magic	*Jon Doy*
The Magic Sweetshop	*Enid Blyton*
Adventures on Skull Island	*Tony Bradmead*
Mrs. Wobble the Waitress	*The Ahlbergs*
Off to School (Poems) compiled by	*Tony Bradman*
Badger's Race	*Alison Carter*
Clever Trevor	*Girling & Blundel*
Disasters	*Horrible Histories*
The Day we Brightened up the School	*Mick Gavar*
My Sport Gymnastics	
Young Hippo Magic	*Ann Ruffell*
George's Marvellous Medicine	*Roald Dahl*
Two Victorian Families	
Jacko	*Thompson &*
Crossland	
There's an Awful lot of Weirdos in our Neighbourhood	*McNaughton*
Ursula by the Sea	*Sheila Lovelle*
The Crazy Shoe Shuffle	*Gillian Cross*
Yob	*Dick King-Smith*
Hamsters	*Michaela Miller*
All About Dinosaurs	*Michaela Miller*

The Iron Man	*Ted Hughes*
Precious Potter	*Rose Impy*
Winnie in Winter	*Paul & Thomas*
The Magic Finger	*Roald Dahl*
James and the Giant Peach	*Roadl Dahl*
Amazing Mammals	*Alexandra Parsons*
The Witch who made Children Cry	*Denis Bond*
Puppy's Beach Adventure	*Geral Durrell*
Alien on the 99th Floor	*Jenny Nimmo*
Victoria's Party	*Hazel Townson*
Pepi and the Secret Names	*Walsh & French*
More About Paddington	*Michael Bond*

APPENDIX K
List of books recalled being read by assistants when young

Age range 25 – 35 years - Books

At school	*At home*
The Hobbit	*Fairytales*
101 Dalmatians	*The Famous Five*
To Kill a Mockingbird	*Treasure Island*
Of Mice & Men	*Comics*
Macbeth	*Railway Children*
	The Secret Seven
	Paddington Bear

Age range 25 – 35 years – Authors

At school	*At home*
Shakespeare	*Enid Blyton*
	Roald Dahl
	Carolyn Keene
	Jane Austin
	Bronte sisters

Age range 36 – 45 years – Books

At school	*At home*
Janet & John	*Comics*
Paradise Lost	*Annuals*
Animal Farm	*Chalet School Storied*
Classics	*Swallows & Amazons*
Ladybird Books	*Secret Seven*
	Famous Five
	Paddington Bear
	Alice in Wonderland
	Narnia Chronicles
	The Silver Sword
	Speedway Magazine[1]
	The Railway Children
	Little Women
	The Secret Garden
	Heidi
	Black Beauty
	Princess Comics
	Anne of Grey Gables
	My Naughty Little Sister
	Jackie Magazine

Age range 36 – 45 years – Authors

Chaucer	*James Herriot*
Shakespeare	*Enid Blyton*
	Ruby Ferguson
	Hans Anderson
	Ian Serralier
	L.M. Montgomery

[1] Reading choices will be influenced by books available. In recent years the range of picture books has increased enormously. With today's school children Roald Dahl has probably taken over from Enid Blyton.

Dorothy Edwards
Johanna Spyri

N.B. The greatest number of respondents was in this age group.

Age range 46 – 55 years – books

At school
History of Mr. Polly
Classics
History Books
Plays
Poetry
Janet & John
Ladybird Books

At home

Comics
Sunny Stories
Fairy Stories
What Katy Did
Little Christians Pilgrimage
Bumble Books
Black Beauty
Shep the Sheepdog
Mr. Pinkwhistle
Simple poetry
Bobbsy Twins
Treasure Island
School Stories
Biographies
School Friend
Famous Ballerinas
Tarka the Otter
Annuals
Alibi Children
Swallows & Amazons
Famous Five
Emil & the Detectives
The Borrowers
Autobiographies
Non-fiction
Water Babies
Heidi
Winnie the Pooh
Peter Pan
Greek & Roman Mythology
Adventure stories
Stamp collecting magazines
Secret Seven

Age range 46 – 55 years - authors

H.G. Wells
Orwell
Zola
Dickens
Bronte sisters
Shakespeare

Arthur Ransome
A. A. Milne
Enid Blyton
Hans Anderson
Grimm
Wendy Cooper
Kenneth Graham
Louisa May Alcott
Steinbeck
Heyer
Du Maurier

Assistants in this age group provided long lists – second largest group of respondents.

Age range 56 – 65 years Books

At school
Beau Geste
As you like it
A Midsummer's Nights Dream
Classics

At home
Famous Five
Black Beauty
Abbey Books
Rupert Bear
Mystery & Adventure
Comics

Age range 56 –65 years – Authors

Shakespeare

Enid Blyton

Other – no age given on questionnaire - books

At school
Janet & John
Dick & Dora
Trumpet Major
Animal Farm
Theseus
MacBeth
Lord of the Rings

At home
Famous Five
Secret Seven
Grimms Fairy Tales
The Faraway Tree
Bunty comics

Other – no age given – authors

Enid Blyton

The same authors and books were mentioned many times in the different age groups. Particular comics were mentioned more by the older readers – visual literacy before colour television?

Age range 56 – 65 years Books

At school
Beau Geste
As you like it
A Midsummer's Nights Dream
Classics

At home
Famous Five
Black Beauty
Abbey Books
Rupert Bear
Mystery & Adventure
Comics

Age range 56 –65 years – Authors

Shakespeare

Enid Blyton

Other – no age given on questionnaire - books

At school
Janet & John
Dick & Dora
Trumpet Major
Animal Farm
Theseus
MacBeth
Lord of the Rings

At home
Famous Five
Secret Seven
Grimms Fairy Tales
The Faraway Tree
Bunty comics

Other – no age given – authors

Enid Blyton

The same authors and books were mentioned many times in the different age groups. Particular comics were mentioned more by the older readers – visual literacy before colour television?